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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

TALKING WITH TEENAGE WRITERS:
A TEACHER LEARNS ABOUT TEACHING WRITING

©

BY

JANET ELLEN HANCOCK

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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Janet E. Hancock

10607 10th Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T6J 6G7

October 2, 1992

"Every writer is as personal as a fingerprint."

-- Geoffrey

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled TALKING WITH TEENAGE WRITERS: A TEACHER LEARNS ABOUT TEACHING WRITING submitted by JANET ELLEN HANCOCK in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION in SECONDARY EDUCATION.

M L Iveson
Dr. Margaret L. Iveson
(Advisor)

John E. Oster
Dr. John E. Oster

Joyce Edwards
Dr. Joyce M. Edwards

OCTOBER 2, 1992

DEDICATION

To my husband, David, who is always there for me. To my children, Janine, Janis and Ian, for their patience, support and love. To my advisor, mentor and friend, Dr. Margaret Iveson, for her thoughtful guidance and for believing in me enough to let go, and act as a teacher in the truest sense of the word.

ABSTRACT

This study is an exploration of the writing processes of fifteen writers from six junior-high schools. These enthusiastic writers were selected from those attending a writing conference. These able writers' experiences provide many implications for the teaching of writing.

Two face-to-face interviews were conducted with each student. Approximately forty questions about writing were given at each session, many constructed from a pilot interview with an accomplished student writer. The conversations were recorded on a tape recorder and transcribed onto a computer. After the first interview, transcripts were analysed for themes and specifics. This analysis partially directed the questions at the second interview. Spontaneous ideas that arose in the interviews were also followed. Students were given journals at the end of the first interview, and asked to write down ideas about writing or any ideas for stories. To the second interview, they were asked to bring these journals and writing to share with the researcher.

Able writers have tremendous knowledge about their own writing processes and about how teachers can organize classrooms to provide successful writing experiences and instruction for all student writers. The responses of these adolescent writers makes up the body of this thesis because of the importance of what they have to say to researchers and teachers. Quotations from the student writers allow readers to experience these insights directly and to recognize the uniqueness of each writer.

Working with what is unique about each writer is the best way to help student writers improve. Involving students in the classroom process can help students to learn from the community of writers and to set goals and develop, even after they have left writing classrooms.

Teaching, reflecting, researching, and writing are intertwined in this thesis to show how we learn as professionals. The research is told within the framework of autobiography: my history is typical of many teachers, thus is a common ground for others to consider their own practice and research.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction The Evolution of a Writing Teacher 1

Chapter One A Reader/Writer Becomes a Teacher 7

An Introduction to the Chapter 7
The Story Begins -- Early History as a Reader and Writer 7
A Dream to Write Becomes the Desire to Encourage Students to Write 10
Discovering the Writing Process Approach to Teaching Writing 13
Problems with Using the Writing Process Approach 16
Listening to My Students Talk about Writing 18
A Conclusion to the Chapter 20

Chapter Two Researching the Teaching of Writing 22

An Introduction to the Chapter 22
The Research Story Begins -- University and Michael Benton 22
Intrinsic Motivation and Student Ownership of Writing 25
Francis Nolan, Janet Emig, and Teaching Writing Process 27
Perceiving Myself as a Writer 32
A Rationale for Interviewing Student Writers and the Research Design 35
The Formal Research Begins 40
A Conclusion to the Chapter 42

Chapter Three What Able Teenage Writers Say About Their Composing Processes 43

An Introduction to the Chapter 43
Discovering a Reading History 43
Discovering Writing History 45
Current Reading and Writing Habits 47
Finding Ideas to Write about 48
Planning Versus Discovering as a Pre-Writing/Writing Strategy 52
Writing Is a Matter of Finding and Keeping Good Ideas 55
Revision Is a Natural Part of Writing the Original Story 59
Why Some Students Are Reluctant to Change Their Texts 62
Showing Others Your Writing to Help You Revise 64
School Writing Is Different Than Self-Sponsored Writing 66
A Conclusion to the Chapter 69

Chapter Four How Able Teenage Writers Perceive Themselves as Writers 72

An Introduction to the Chapter 72
Writing Growth -- Have You Grown as a Writer Since Grade 8? 72
What Writing Problems Do You Have? 78
How Could You Become a Better Writer? 81
Did the First Interview Change Your Perception of Yourself as a Writer 86
Voice 88
Are You a Writer? 93
A Conclusion to the Chapter 96

Chapter Five Able Teenage Writers Share Their Writing 99

An Introduction to the Chapter 99
Find Something You've Written That You Like and Tell Me Why You Like It 100
A Conclusion to the Chapter 128

Chapter Six Writing in the Classroom 134

An Introduction to the Chapter 134
What Makes Good Writing? 134
Sharing Writing with Other Students 135
Sharing with Teachers and Other Adults 141
How Do You Feel About Journals? 143
Writing at Home Versus Writing at School 149
The Physical Appearance of the Ideal Writing Classroom 150
Do You Have Suggestions for Me as a Writing Teacher? 153
A Conclusion to the Chapter 161

Chapter Seven Teaching and Researching Writing: Considerations for Teaching 165

An Introduction to the Chapter 165
Writing Is an Individual Matter 165
Writing Is Inspiration so Revision Is Sometimes Seen as Meaningless 173
Memories of Reading and Writing 176
Self-Sponsored Versus School Writing 179
Computers, Poetry, and Journals 184
Correctness, Ideas, Self-Esteem and the Willingness to Share 187
A Conclusion to the Chapter 193

Chapter Eight Thesis Conclusion: The Story Continues 196

References 212

Appendix Interview Questions 219

Introduction

The Evolution of a Writing Teacher

The way I teach writing has changed. Like hundreds of other teachers, I have been influenced by the "writing as a process" movement led by Donald Graves, Donald Murray, James Britton, Lucy McCormick Calkins, and many others. Perhaps the most significant change is that instead of having all the answers, I have learned to listen to, and observe the needs, ideas and interests of my students.

This change to a more child-centered, reflective approach to teaching writing has been a result of three major factors. First of all, I have changed because of my experiences at university studying and learning about theory which led to the writing of this thesis. Secondly, I have changed because my research has taught me that talking to students is a valuable source of information about writing instruction. Finally, I have changed because of the opportunity I have had to reflect on my history as a learner and my development as a writing teacher through the experience of writing this thesis as a personal narrative.

Like other teachers, I was interested in reading about writing theory grounded in practice. Reading about Nancie Atwell and Tom Romano's classrooms was a valuable learning experience. Both educators discussed how they learned to change the way they taught writing by reflecting on their writing and teaching practice. They explained how they implemented new teaching methods by providing concrete examples of teacher and student dialogues and student writing. With the hope that other teachers considering change may read my story and reflect on their own personal histories as learners, writers, and teachers, I also have written about and reflected on my writing and teaching practice. Therefore, my research with adolescent writers is presented within the context of an autobiography outlining my development as an educator.

Like Nancie Atwell and Tom Romano, I have also included student writing and students' voices. Unlike Atwell and Romano, however, who use students' examples to substantiate their ideas about teaching and to demonstrate how they implemented writing programs in their classrooms, I have included the students in my study as the primary research focus. Student writers have knowledge about the conditions that allow them to develop their writing potential and this in turn has application for teaching writing in the classroom. Therefore, the techniques of autobiography and interview were used as informing sources for conducting qualitative research.

Although I worked hard as a teacher to improve my writing instruction so that my students improved their writing, I never felt comfortable with the way I taught writing because I didn't feel that my students' writing products reflected their best writing. In order to learn how to become a better writing teacher, I realized that I needed a complete break from teaching in order to stand back and reflect on my teaching practice. I felt that if I talked to student writers who were successful at writing, I might come to a more knowledgeable understanding of how students wrote. As I interviewed teenagers, participated in my university course work, and read as much as I could about writing instruction, I constantly re-examined my teaching practice.

This process of conducting research while reflecting on practice meant that I had to examine my history as a learner in order to understand how I came to hold the beliefs I held about teaching writing. I soon realized that I had always been interested in developing my own ability as a writer, so while I attended university and conducted research, I also participated in a writing course and experimented with writing. The educators I studied, such as Donald Murray, strongly advocated that writing teachers should write; I felt that examining my own writing process by writing was necessary to fully understand how to become a stronger writing teacher. Therefore, one other reason I wrote this thesis in the form of an autobiography was to further develop my own writing, while I examined my beliefs.

Writing a thesis through a narrative lens allowed me to distance myself from my teaching past. I learned by reflection through writing that my years of teaching, re-teaching, and experimenting with writing instruction were valuable as a research tool. Using writing to reflect on previous classroom instruction while at the same time studying theory allowed me to unravel some of the things I knew in order to solidify the strong teaching base I had, add new learnings and continue to develop. Finally, the act of writing reminded me that finding time to write is an important aspect of my personal development.

Nancie Atwell and Tom Romano's work has shown us that teachers are interested in reading about theory when it is well supported by classroom practice. While many scholarly sources exist to help inform teachers about practice, few studies are available to access what adolescents say about writing. For this reason, I felt that it was important to become as well-read as I could in terms of theory, to work hard at my own writing, and also to interview able teenage writers.

The experience of talking in an interview situation with a young writer as a fellow writer was a new opportunity for me. The students' insights about their own writing styles, preferences, and problems in self-sponsored writing and school classroom writing proved to be a valuable learning experience. Rereading the transcripts of these interviews, I found time and time again that the students' knowledge of their writing practice was significant. I discovered that their knowledge and experiences often parallelled what educators such as Janet Emig said about student writers.

For example, Emig (1971) concluded from her study of The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders that teachers did not allow class time for revision The students in my study expressed concern over their lack of understanding about revision. They wanted to know how to improve as writers and said that instruction on revision techniques would be valuable, and that their teachers provided very little class time for students to revise their writing.

However, I was interested in learning first hand, in as much detail as I could, about issues of specific relevance to my interests and experiences as a classroom teacher with adolescent writers. The fundamental interview questions I asked at the interviews were based on educational theory I had studied, and issues that had arisen from my own teaching practice. However, based on what I had learned during my pilot study interviews I decided that it was valuable as a research procedure to allow questions to develop during the course of the interview, based on the idiosyncratic writing personality of each adolescent interviewed. I found that the questions that developed spontaneously during the interview, because of a student's response that was unique or original in some way, often became avenues of thinking about writing that I had not read or considered pursuing before hand.

While the students I interviewed often shared opinions on various aspects of writing, I found that their individual stories and experiences with writing were so varied that it was important to capture as much about their individual writing idiosyncrasies as I could. The collective voices of these student writers created for me a rich tapestry of differing and yet connecting threads about student writing. Unlike one composite photograph, this thesis resembles more closely a writing portfolio of students' voices.

As much as possible, I have tried to let the writers speak. Consequently, much of this thesis is devoted to the authentic voices of student writers telling teachers what they know about classroom writing and writing at home. For this reason, there are numerous quotations in the sections "What Teenagers Say About Writing", and "What Teenagers Reveal for Teaching Writing". Sharing the direct quotations of students emphasizes the importance of listening to what students say.

Including the voices of the teens in my study is also important for another reason. It is a reminder that education is about teaching children. The messy, imperfect craft of children's writing is thrilling to teach because it is unpredictable, always changing and developing with the unpredictable, changing nature of children and children's ideas.

After completing the interviews with the student writers in this study, I returned to teaching on a half-time basis. Teaching half-time while I wrote this thesis meant that I taught and reflected, revised my teaching style, and taught and reflected. It was a year of tremendous growth. While I had focused primarily on writing instruction through my university work, I came to realize how very connected reading and writing were throughout my teaching.

The most significant teaching accomplishment that year was that many of my students talked about themselves as readers and writers. The quality of writing produced by my students was superior to writing produced in previous years' classes. These students were more committed to writing and their writing reflected this commitment.

I wish I could say at this point in the journey that I have all the answers to my questions about how student writers can best develop to their potential. I believe I have some, but primarily I have learned that this is only the beginning. There is so much more to learn. As I continue to develop as a writer, and as I continue to work with other teachers and children, I believe I will continue to develop as a writing teacher. I know my evolution is far from over.

Chapter One

A Reader and Writer Becomes a Teacher

An Introduction to the Chapter

The first chapter of my thesis illustrates how my love of reading and writing led to a teaching career in English language arts. Writing instruction was not always successful, however; even with the discovery of the writing process approach to teaching writing. Listening to authors' presentations on how they wrote corroborated the process approach to teaching writing, but I found there were still difficulties with my writing program. Talking with my students one day in class about their writing practices revealed that students had many ideas to contribute about how I should teach writing in order to allow them to grow as writers!

I enrolled in a writing class at the University of Alberta and began to reflect on my classroom instruction from the point of view of a developing writer. This was the link I had been missing! I decided to interview able student writers about their writing processes to find out if there were implications for teaching writing.

The Story Begins -- Early History as a Reader and Writer

My parents are avid readers. With their encouragement I entered a lifelong romance with books at an early age. As small children, my sister and I curled up next to my mother at bed time, heads bowed across her lap, our young bodies snuggled close to her side, as we listened to the magical stories of Mr. McGregor and Peter, Flopsy, Mopsy, and the Cottontail rabbits. Some nights I drifted asleep to Robert Louis Stevenson's beautiful words, agreeing wholeheartedly that in summer it wasn't fair to "have to go to bed by day", and "hear the grown-up people's feet still going past me in the street".

My early introduction to books, as I listened and imagined worlds before I was able to read, led to the desire to choose and read my own books as soon as I could read independently. When I was old enough to choose my own books I fell in love with the stories of the Famous Five by Enid Blyton and ventured inside underground caves with the children and their parrot in search of buried treasure. The old grey stone walls of the Listowel library were a haven for my best friend Kim and I as we spent countless hours of our elementary school years in wooden chairs pulled up to wooden tables poring over the pages of Anne of Green Gables.

My reading interests changed as I grew older, but my love affair with the written word only deepened. Junior high school meant running for my life from the book police and their mechanical dogs in Farenheit 451. I read every Ray Bradbury book I could find and marvelled at his gift of storytelling. In high school classes I was frequently reading a novel behind the text, occasionally startled by a change in the teacher's voice so that I jumped slightly in my desk and gave myself away. At university, English courses were a pleasant surprise because students were encouraged to read books and expected to discuss them in class !

Today, among my prized possessions are a beautiful soft cloth-covered book of Longfellow's poetry with gilded copper pages and brown ink illustrations given to me long ago by my now deceased grandmother, and a beautiful slim green volume called Janet's Boots, also a gift presented to my parents by an elderly friend when I was a baby. Both books were written some time before the 1900's. It brings me joy to turn their dusty worn pages. I know that my love affair with books will only continue to grow and ripen as long as I live.

Francis Nolan (1978) credits early exposure to books as enhancing the development of a child's writing ability. He said, "the importance of wide reading by children and also reading to children, as an aid to the development of their writing capacity is an important implication for teaching" (Nolan, p. 234). Certainly, in my case, a love of reading led to a desire and interest in learning to write. Although I don't know when I started to write, I remember wanting to be a writer as early as grade two. However, working with my own words proved to be much more difficult than reading and dreaming someone else's words. We were encouraged to write our own stories in grade school, but as I grew older, English classes concentrated much more on grammar and the formal structure of composition and provided only the occasional opportunity to experiment with "creative" writing. The result was that the older I got, the less I wrote.

That is, with the exception of my grade ten year, when I had a wonderful English teacher who loved to read poetry to us. That year, we were asked to write a booklet of our own poetry, complete with illustrations. How eager I was to get my poetry assignment back! I continued to experiment with poetry and wrote many lines of unrequited love and the usual teenage meanderings all through my high school years.

As Frank Smith (1982) explains "the practice of reading may also engender interest in writing and provides opportunity for encountering relevant conventions in general" (p. 55). I believe that because my grade ten English teacher shared her love of reading and writing poetry with me, I felt encouraged to experiment further with writing poetry, to the extent that I still write poetry today.

However, I never gave up the dream to become a novelist. I found that getting started writing a story wasn't difficult: it was writing more than just a beginning that proved impossible. While I attended university as an undergraduate education student majoring in English, I amassed drawers of one or two paragraph beginnings to stories that never developed. Writing proved to be hard work. The stories I started never seemed good enough. They weren't worldly enough. I wasn't worldly enough. I felt that a person must be gifted in order to write and from my paultry efforts with words it was clear that I wasn't talented, let alone gifted.

At university my English professors perpetuated a sense of awe and mystery about the authors we studied. I assumed that authors were dead people who toiled for a lifetime to write classic works of fiction that changed people's lives forever. Even in my modern English literature classes the mystique of the author was such that it was impossible to visualize any writer at work. Somehow the great writers seemed able to write from birth. Contemporary authors who were prolific at their art were not true novelists. So believing that my own writing efforts were pathetic: yet filled with the desire to write, I continued to struggle, keeping the fact that I wrote hidden from everyone.

A Dream to Write Becomes the Desire to Encourage Students to Write

When I graduated from university as a language arts teacher and had my own classroom, I wanted my students to write. I soon found that the more encouragement and practice students were given the more they wrote.

Together we wrote our own "choose your own adventure" stories when the books by the same name became popular with students. The format of writing short entries, one per chapter in the second person was easy for even poorer writers to do. Students enjoyed thinking up as many diabolical plots as they could and then having their peers read their stories, experiencing falling off a cliff or ending in a maze with no way out.

One year we wrote in our journals every day on topics I provided from a teacher resource book. At Christmas time, feeling that the writing had been successful but that we needed a greater challenge, I asked my students to create their own book of writing to dedicate to someone as a Christmas present. The idea was an exciting one but many students had difficulty completing the project. Those who did finish their books met with varying degrees of success. There was, however, general concensus that the project had been worthwhile, although difficult.

One year, my students and I learned how rewarding answering younger children's letters to Santa Claus could be. From that time on it became a yearly tradition in our school. The junior high students wrote thoughtful, insightful answers to younger children's Christmas wish lists that often asked for presents beyond the commercial realm, such as world peace. Stickers, glitter, fancy paper materialized from home, unrequested; and on the receiving end, along with all the fancy treats, and maybe a gift from a gift exchange, the carefully prized letter from someone at the North Pole also went home.

With some classes it seemed like any excuse would do to start us writing. At these times a cool breeze lightly rattling the blinds on the windows was enough incentive to encourage everyone to write. Many of these students came to my classes with a love of English fostered by teachers in the younger grades. Together, we came up with exciting ideas to write about and share. Their imaginations were limitless. As Tom Romano (1987) says, "Young writers must be cut loose. They must write frequently in high-speed chases after meaning, adventures that will take various routes, each different from the previous one" (p. 6). Whatever the reason, these students willingly put aside their books and I my well-organized lesson plan, and we wrote.

On other occasions an incident at school aroused such strong emotional reactions that the students needed to write their feelings down. For example, one year a group of grade nine students came to my language arts class in a highly charged emotional state believing that the academic challenge class had been given the authority by the school to make all the important decisions about the grade nine graduation exercises. Writing became an excellent venue for open discussion and problem solving. Once the students were able to express their opinions in writing, they calmed down and group leaders within the class developed a plan to make their concerns known to the school. Through the act of writing down their feelings the students learned to be more objective about the situation, and determine a way to resolve it.

At these times, continuing with the regular lesson plan would have been pointless. The youngsters were too involved in life outside the classroom. Writing about their feelings became a meaningful way to find a solution to a problem.

However, some attempts to encourage students to write were met with frustration. For example, sometimes with certain students writing did not come easily. These students were not interested in writing; perhaps, they had a history of difficulty. It may also have been that writing had not been presented in a way that was meaningful to them. Some students have no understanding of how writers write. The reason for this may be that:

> Most students have never seen writing being made. They believe that teachers and writers know a magic rite that places words on the page in the order that is full of grace and meaning the first

> time, that each word arrives correctly spelled, each piece of punctuation appears at the moment it is needed, and that all rules of rhetoric, grammar, and mechanics fall into place on their own. (Murray, 1985, p. 105)

Even among strong classes, there was always an adolescent such as the student I once taught called Wayne, who hated writing no matter how clever the assignment. I spent hours with Wayne to find some subject of interest that would entice him to write. He was not interested in writing no matter what I did. Wayne would not write because Wayne chose not to write or because Wayne had trouble writing. Over time, the Waynes in my classes drove me crazy. Sometimes it seemed as if the whole class was made up of Waynes. I felt that I could and should do more for students such as Wayne.

On the whole, my writing instruction, was sporadic and piecemeal. This lack of a consistently taught, well developed writing program, combined with problem students like Wayne, created within me a nagging dissatisfaction with my teaching of writing.

Discovering the Writing Process Approach to Teaching Writing

When a colleague persuaded me to attend the Canadian Council of Teachers of English (C.C.T.E.) convention in Edmonton, I heard about the writing process and a man named Donald Murray. The ideas attributed to Murray were exciting! For example, Murray believed that we could create a classroom learning environment that closely resembled the way that professional writers engaged in writing. He explains this by talking about writing as a craft and therefore something that all writers can do.

> Writing is a craft before it is an art; writing may appear magic, but it is our responsibility to take

> our students backstage to watch the pigeons being tucked up the magician's sleeve. The process of writing can be studied and understood. We can re-create most of what a student or professional writer does to produce effective writing. (Murray, 1985, p.4)

Following the conference, I continued to read whatever I came across on the topic of teaching writing as a process, and I continued to attend whatever workshops or sessions were available to me.

I learned that Donald Murray advocated that writing was a series of recognizable stages that all writers progress through. The focus for instruction was the process and not the product as had been formerly taught. The stages in the process were considered to be recursive, meaning that the writer could progress back and forth through the stages at his or her own pace. There was no linear pattern in the writing process.

Donald Murray (1980) identified these stages in the writing process as rehearsing, drafting, and revising. Rehearsing was the stage at which a writer experimented with ideas, discovering the spark of an idea to write about. Once this had happened, the writing took direction. The second stage was the drafting stage where the writer's main concern was to get all his/her ideas down on the page. The final stage, the revision stage was when the author revised the product. The writing process approach made a lot of sense to me and I soon began to implement some of the stages of the writing process in my own classroom.

Meanwhile, at home in the privacy of my office, I continued to experiment with my own writing thanks to Gabrielle Rico's (1983) book Writing the Natural Way. Rico's insistence that the writing technique of webbing was a natural method to encourage writing fluency echoed Murray's ideas about the rehearsing technique of brainstorming. Soon my writing students were webbing on a daily basis. The Waynes still existed but their opposition was less vehement now that there was a strategy to help them come up with ideas.

I was also fortunate to attend a number of readings by authors such as Monica Hughes and Timothy Findley, who talked about their own writing strategies. It was clear that becoming a writer involved perspiration as well as inspiration.

At this time teachers were strongly encouraged to teach their English students to write according to a series of stages. I knew I was on the right track with my students. At an in-service conducted by Donna Watson, an Edmonton Public School Board language arts consultant (at that time), I was introduced to Kirby and Liner's (1981) book Inside Out, which I read over the summer. Kirby and Liner's practical suggestions for teaching writing strategies came from a philosophical focus that meshed comfortably with my own understanding of how students wrote, and with everything I had heard and read about the writing process.

In 1986, I attended an international C.C.T.E. conference in Ottawa, where I was able to hear Donald Graves and Donald Murray speak. This was a turning point in my career. Attending an international conference and hearing such significant English educators, as well as having the opportunity to talk to many classroom teachers who had returned to university to conduct fulltime research about their classroom practice, was intellectually stimulating! Attending the conference firmly established in my mind the appropriateness of experimenting as much as possible with the writing process approach to teaching writing.

One of the guest speakers at the Ottawa conference was Joy Kogawa, author of Obason, a book I had read and loved. Ms. Kogawa's talk about her writing process, discovering through her writing voice as she wrote what she was going to write, reinforced for me Donald Murray's theory about the discovery aspect to writing. The more I listened to authors, the more I felt the link between the writing process that Graves and Murray espoused and the writing styles of authors. Perhaps writing wasn't such a mystery after all. I began to think that teaching my students the writing process approach might provide them with success at writing. Everything was coming together nicely.

Problems with Using the Writing Process Approach

That fall I enthusiastically presented my students with large sheets of chart paper on which I'd drawn a representation of the writing process as huge balloons explaining the different steps to writing success. Firmly believing that the writing process approach to teaching writing was a panacea to all my students' writing problems, I zealously led my classes through the stages adapted from Murray to pre-writing, writing, revising for content, editing, writing a final draft and publishing.

In order to come up with writing topics, in each writing class I gave students a new page with a different cartoon, brief newspaper article or human interest photo taken from the newspaper. I also used writing exercises and topics from people such as Kirby and Liner (1981), that I had used with some success in the past. Often, I created topics that I thought students would be interested in; occasionally students were asked to contribute writing topic ideas. Once I had a writing topic for the whole class to write about, I expected everyone to work hard for ten to fifteen minutes on pre-writing. The pre-writing activity was always the same. Centered on the otherwise blank piece of paper was the topic. Students were to brainstorm ideas using the clustering technique (Gabrielle Rico, 1983) I had taught them. Some days I allowed students to choose their own topics and I discovered that several students usually needed my direction, or my approval. During pre-writing time the room was silent. I briefly wrote on the same topic at my desk, and then monitored my students' progress by walking around the room. As much as possible, I kept everyone focused on the task at hand.

Allocating specific time for pre-writing and in-class writing enabled everyone in the class to complete a first draft at approximately the same time. Once the initial writing was completed however, it became difficult to monitor. I had learned to ask for a draft and a final copy which I called the "polished copy", but when the work was handed in the two pieces of writing looked identical. However, I was enthusiastic and persistent and managed to lead my students through the writing process to a piece of writing we could then share by reading aloud or posting on a bulletin board.

One day a talented grade seven writer gave me the first draft of a novel she was writing and asked me to help her edit her manuscript. The forty typed pages she handed me represented hours of hard work at the typewriter. Believing that Kathy was keen about writing several drafts and really needed my expertise at editing, I happily penciled all kinds of corrections in the margins. Instead of an enthusiastic reaction, Kathy was close to tears at the prospect of having to work so hard at revising her novel. For the rest of that year whenever I asked her how her revisions were coming, Kathy shrugged her shoulders and avoided answering me. It was a reminder to me that "how we receive children's writing affects their willingness to write" (Rogers, 1985, p. 197).

In language arts classes the initial enthusiasm of my students towards the writing process started to fade. I began to hear grumblings about what hard work writing a story was. Drafts and final copies of students' stories showed only occasional surface structure changes. More and more students were reluctant to share their work with the whole class. As a group, everyone was keen to do pre-writing exercises, but by the time revision came the writing momentum initiated during pre-writing time was lost.

It was getting harder and harder to keep the class working together. My talented writers asked to work at their own pace. Waiting for everyone in the class to find a topic bored them. They had story ideas and wanted to get started writing. These students wanted assistance when they were done writing the first draft. They wanted me to tell them how to make their writing stronger! Comfortable writing, my strong students needed help revising. However, most of my time and energy was consumed by my weaker writers who needed help defining the topic and just getting started writing. Because the writers with immediate problems needed help the moment we started writing class, their needs took precedence over more able writers. Also, because everyone in the class was so dependent on my direction, waiting for me to circulate to all the hands that were up with questions gave students looking for an opportunity time to misbehave. My time to write with my students had disappeared, taken up by the necessity of helping everyone else write. Teaching writing had become an exhausting experience!

Talking to my fellow language arts teachers I realized that they were experiencing similar problems with their own writing instruction using the writing process What was wrong?

Listening to My Students Talk about Writing

Although my writing program was proving problematic in some respects, in others it was thriving. One area of strength was the cooperative learning projects my students did with other classes and grade levels when they worked on special projects. At these times there was simply too much happening for me to organize everyone. Somehow the work got done anyway, and it was work of a high calibre. Romano explains that "our responsibility as writing teachers is to help students learn personal processes for creating writing that enable them to create their best writing" (Romano,1987, p. 52). My students were able to find their own ways of working through the assignments.

Another area of promise involved a bonus system where students could earn extra marks for effort if they entered writing or reading contests. For the first time, many students wrote stories at home and submitted these to various sources.

Because there was sometimes a lack of writing enthusiasm, I had gone back to Kirby and Liner and was using some of the shorter writing exercises that the students regarded as being more fun. One activity involved taking my language arts classes outside the classroom to record different sensual impressions of nature that would serve as the inspiration for a piece of writing. Instead of the disaster I was expecting by relinquishing my safe classroom control to allow different classes of adolescents to go for a writer's walk with me, I found that this adventure inspired many excellent pieces of student writing.

One day I asked my students to share something -- anything, that they had written. When no one volunteered to read a story I asked them to share just one line from something they had written instead. "All you have to do is read one line you like and tell us why you like it. I'll go first," I said.

After I'd read a few lines I'd written everyone else volunteered to read theirs. Before I knew it we were all talking about our individual writing processes. It was a fascinating class because the students wanted to talk about their successes and difficulties with writing. In fact, as I listened I learned that "in their comments, the children revealed awareness of many facets of what writers 'do' to effectively communicate with their audiences" (Nolan, 1978, p. 234). Together we talked openly about writing and I realized that I had a lot to learn about how students wrote from students!.

A Conclusion to the Chapter

My experiences had shown that teaching writing as a process was worthwhile. My students now realized that writing involved progressing through various stages to complete a finished product. This meant that writing was something everyone could do! However, although they were more comfortable with the act of writing, they depended on my reassurance and constantly waited for my directions at every stage. Trying to please everyone, I was spending the majority of my time with the most dependent students and many students were frustrated. In general, my students did not feel responsible for their writing. For example, if they were having trouble making an idea work they felt they had to consult with me before they could continue.

When students had opportunities to work with other students in the class or even in other classes or other grades on projects, I had to trust them to organize themselves and complete the activity without my constant supervision, because there were too many things happening at the same time to organize everyone at every stage. I discovered that when students took control of the writing project including taking the responsibility for decision making, they enjoyed writing. It was difficult to give up my control of the classroom, but on the occasions when I had done so, the students had shown me that they could produce excellent work.

Even taking students outside to write had been successful because students had known my expectations for their behavior and their work, and yet, once again I had let go of my regular classroom control to take a risk. The writing that resulted from our nature walk contained some of the most specific sensory details and original descriptions that I had seen all year.

Giving bonuses for extra effort resulted in more enthusiastic productivity and a willingness on the part of some students to pursue writing contests and publishing opportunities. This suggested that some students were motivated by an external reward. It also seemed as if some students wanted to be recognized for their efforts and not just marks.

Part of learning to relinquish some classroom control meant learning to admit to my students that I did not have all the answers. The day I volunteered to read my writing was a significant breakthrough for me because I became a fellow writer with my students. Through our class discussions I learned that talking about our frustrations with writing together helped all of us feel better about writing. We also shared our successes. The students' comments revealed that they knew a great deal more about writing than I had ever realized.

Chapter Two

Researching the Teaching of Writing

An Introduction to the Chapter

In Chapter Two, the writing pedagogies of Donald Murray, Donald Graves, Michael Benton, Teresa Amabile, Nancie Atwell, Tom Romano, Francis Nolan, Janet Emig, and others are discussed in terms of teaching writing as a process and how I taught writing in my classroom. Also mentioned in this chapter are my experiences with personal writing in two university courses, the impact that learning to write as a student had on my understanding of teaching writing, and connections between my teaching practice and the theory I was reading and had read.

Finally, also explained in this chapter is that through reflecting on my practice in the light of new ideas I decided to conduct my research by interviewing able teenage writers to discover what new truths they could tell me.

The Research Story Begins -- University and Michael Benton

I applied for and was granted a sabbatical leave for study at the University of Alberta. I enrolled in the Master's Program in Secondary Education and met my advisor. Before I had even attended my first university class, I knew that I wanted to find out all I could about how to encourage students to write.

University was a dream come true because it allowed me the break I needed from teaching to review my classroom instruction, particularly my writing program. Returning to university at this time in my career, after having taught language arts for close to ten years, was necessary in order for me to continue to feel confident about my professional ability as a teacher. I soon discovered that there had been many new and exciting developments in the field of English language arts education.

> There is an enormous and continually growing resource of information in our field, and composition teachers should continue to read for inspiration, stimulation, reinforcement, and to keep alive the sense of community we can have with writers and teachers of writing alive and dead. What we read can bring us to our own writing desks and to our classrooms with renewed energy and vision. (Murray, 1985, p. 249)

One of my first university classes influenced what would become the research direction I chose. As part of the requirements for the class, we were asked to choose suggested texts by English educators to read and present to our fellow students. My first text was a collection of articles edited by Anthony Adams called New Directions for Teaching English (1982). One article in particular had an enormous impact on me. Entitled "How Authors Write...How Children Write: Toward a Rationale for Creative Writing" by Michael Benton seemed to have been written for me, since Benton suggested that the creative process that writers undergo to create a finished product is the same process for all creative endeavours.

Once again the link to teaching writing process as I understood it from reading Donald Murray and Donald Graves was supported. This time, I began to think of writing as a creative process that could be connected to other creative processes.

Benton credited Wallace (1926) with the idea that creativity had a structure involving four stages that were believed to be the same for all creative acts including writing. Wallace had called these stages preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. Preparation was the stage during which a problem was investigated from all angles. Incubation was the stage at which the creator allowed for the conscious abandonment of thought on the problem in order to allow unconscious mental activity to occur. Illumination was the sudden appearance of a spark, what Wallace called a "happy idea" which allowed for the creative expression to take direction. And, finally Verification was the work involved in testing and expressing the new idea.

Benton had done extensive research on published authors in order to understand the development of their writing. His interviews with C.S. Lewis and Enid Blyton, and his research of autobiographies from writers like William Wordsworth and many others, revealed that published authors experienced a creative process during writing that parallelled the creative process Wallace had identified.

Wallace's creativity theory about recognizable stages for creative acts was encouraging information; because, if published authors created according to clearly recognizable stages, then maybe all writers worked through a similar structure. If incubation was necessary for writers to abandon conscious thought to work through the problem (for example, how to turn an idea for a story into a plot), then how could all of my students experience incubation at the same time? It didn't make sense that all scientists worked through a problem as a series of stages experiencing each stage together. Yet, this was how I had interpreted the writing process paradigm.

Benton's point that the time that each of these phases occurs depends on the work habits of the individual was fascinating. I began to reflect upon my writing instruction in view of this new perspective. Possibly some of the frustration I had experienced teaching writing process to a whole class came from my lack of understanding about individual student differences in the use of time, level of experience, and style of learning. Benton explains that:

> Although four distinct phases can be discerned, a rigid chronology for their occurence is distorting: overlap and fusion of these phases appear to take place according to the temperamental idiosyncrasies of the creative individual. Hence, the paradox that any creative activity has both a discernible common pattern and particular, unrepeatable characteristics. The act of creation is both generalizable and unique. (p. 143)

I wanted to discover more about student's individual writing idiosyncracies. Had I taken the individual writing styles of my students into consideration? Reading Benton's research of Wallace's theories about creativity provided me with the framework I needed to explore the teaching of writing as a process, in a broader context.

Intrinsic Motivation and Student Ownership of Writing

My advisor introduced me to the work of Teresa Amabile, a psychologist interested in creativity research. Amabile's research supported Benton's in terms of the four recognizable stages in the creative process. What was interesting about Amabile's work was her research emphasis on intrinsic motivation. Amabile believed that extrinsic rewards for creative endeavours actually dampened creativity by controlling the act. I had never considered this notion in terms of the classroom writing environment.

Amabile's findings can be summed up by her Intrinsic Motivation Principle of Creativity. "People will be most creative when they feel motivated primarily by the interest, enjoyment, satisfaction and challenge of the work itself -- not by external pressures" (Kohn, 1987, p. 55). Furthermore, Amabile noted that "Evidence shows children's intrinsic motivation for learning steadily decreases as they go through elementary school" (p. 57).

Amabile suggested this decrease occurs because teachers place too many restrictions on the learning environment. The scientists in Amabile's study told her that while receiving a clear overall direction on a project was useful, they performed best when they were given the freedom to decide how to accomplish goals. Reflecting once again on my classroom writing instruction, I remembered how I had determined everyone's goals and directed most of the writing experience myself.

It was also interesting to read that according to Amabile not all phases in the creative act are negatively affected by external circumstances. For example, Amabile suggested that the early stage of preparing, as well as the later stage of communicating and validating one's idea, could benefit from conventional rewards. However, "what comes in between dreaming up something new is most apt to happen when the motivation is love rather than money" (Kohn, 1987, p. 55).

What motivation existed for the students in my writing classes to write? Why would they want to write if I was controlling all of the writing conditions? Both the work of Benton and Amabile offered me new insights into my classroom practice.

The work of Nancie Atwell was also extremely interesting. Eagerly I read Atwell's (1987) book In the Middle: Writing, Reading and Learning With Adolescents. Atwell's philosophy of turning much of the responsibility for learning over to students sounded interesting. Was it feasible to expect students to take ownership for their work?

Next I came across the work of Tom Romano (1987) author of Clearing the Way. This book was inspiring to read because Romano took me through the writing process in an easily understandable fashion including excerpts from his conversations with students and samples of their writing. Again I read that turning the responsibility for writing over to students was possible and necessary, for students to grow as writers. Both Atwell and Romano believed that students had a great deal to contribute to teachers' understanding of the process of writing if only teachers would take the time to ask them.

When I reviewed Tom Romano's book for my class, the instructor suggested that I might be interested in the work of Francis Nolan, an educator currently living and writing in Australia, who had completed his doctoral work at the University of Alberta in the area of student writing at the grade six level.

Francis Nolan, Janet Emig, and Teaching Writing Process

Nolan (1978) worked with six able writers on seven story-writing tasks. The purpose of Nolan's study was to learn more about the concerns that young writers have and the stages that they go through during composing. In particular, Nolan wanted to gain insight into the mental activity and the conception of writing held by children. Five of stories were written during individual meetings with the researcher and two stories were written at home.

Research techniques involved the close observation of the writers writing and composing aloud. Videotape recordings were later used to stimulate recall of the activities involved in composing. The researcher also analyzed the children's stories. For the non-videotaped tasks, the children re-read their written products to remember the writing process. Next, the interview transcripts were analyzed according to a category system. Finally, Nolan compiled writer profiles for each of the children based on his interviews with them, their parents and teachers and school records.

Through his research Nolan discovered a variety of concerns and issues that children had about writing; his category system included forty-three different facets of composing. Also, Nolan found that while each child had his or her own individual concerns about composing, the children had many concerns in common.

Nolan discovered that children did not progress through a series of common steps to write a story, and that individuals used different processes in different combinations composing different stories. Furthermore, with his study of these children, he found that the mind moved ahead of and behind the segment that was being written. There were also examples of spontaneous thinking where children learned during the process what they were going to write.

The most exciting idea for me was Nolan's discovery that children had so much knowledge about writing to share with teachers! Teachers could adapt their classroom writing experiences to their students' writing needs if they were willing to listen to their students. "Given the chance to reflect upon and discuss their writing, the children yielded insight into the complexity of the processes underlying the production of a piece. The children took their writing seriously and discussed it honestly and critically" (p.235).

From Nolan's bibliography I came to Janet Emig's (1971) famous work on The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders. For her study, Emig interviewed eight twelfth graders of average and above average ability in four sessions each about their writing experiences. These students were also asked to compose aloud in the presence of the researcher and a taperecorder while writing three different themes.

Emig used what she called "retrospective comment" by the students about their previous writing experiences along with taperecordings of oral composing to devise a category system of the writing process called the "Ten Dimensions of the Composing Process". One of Emig's purposes for using the case study method to conduct this research was to discover if there were differences between "reflexive" and "extensive" methods of composing. Emig (1971) defined reflexive writing as: "The mode that focuses upon the writer's thoughts and feelings concerning his experiences; the chief audience is the writer himself; the domain explored is often the affective; the style is tentative, personal, and exploratory" (p.4). Furthermore, the extensive mode was defined as "the mode that focuses upon the writer conveying a message or a communication to another; the domain explored is usually the cognitive; the style is assured, impersonal and often reportorial" (p. 4).

From the data, Emig concluded that extensive writing occurred primarily as a school-sponsored activity and reflexive writing occurred primarily as a self-sponsored activity. Emig also found that the writing her students did in school was teacher directed towards the production of a composition and that writing assignments in school situations often inhibited students' interest in writing. Too often a teacher-assigned composition was seen as something "a teacher can criticize rather than a process he [the teacher] can help initiate through imagination and sustain through empathy and support" (p. 97).

Furthermore, Emig discovered that English classes were not necessarily conducive to creative expression. There were many reasons for this. Prewriting stages for these grade twelve writers could last an indeterminate length of time in their own self-sponsored writing. One student suggested that she spent as long as two years at the prewriting stage.

Insufficient time was allotted for prewriting in the English classroom. Sometimes prewriting time was not given. While Emig's writers occasionally enjoyed a sense of solitude in some part of their composing process, classrooms were never places where a student could write alone. Teachers did not value revision enough to allot class time; yet, Emig's subjects felt that revision was important to their growth as writers. Finally, to these students the most important evaluators of their written work were their peers. However, fellow students did not read or share written work in these English classrooms. The teacher was the sole evaluator.

Emig concluded that teachers needed to practice writing in both the reflexive and extensive modes in order to understand the differences and adjust their teaching styles accordingly. Possibly because teachers had so little firsthand experience with writing, Emig believed that teachers oversimplified the process so that planning became merely outlining. Furthermore, instruction in composition was often abstract so that only the more able writers understood how to be successful at writing.

The idea that students wrote differently depending on whether or not they were writing for school, hadn't occurred to me. Students who were keen writers and wrote "self-sponsored" writing might be an interesting group to study.

The more I read and thought about the writing process approach to teaching writing, the more I realized that using this approach in the classroom involved adopting a philosophy towards children and the teaching of writing. With a few changes in the way I interpreted the process and a deeper understanding of the way children wrote, I might be able to remedy some of the problems I had teaching writing.

Then I discovered that I was not the only teacher encountering some difficulties teaching writing using the process approach in my classroom. Through an assignment in another of my classes, my course on curriculum development, I chose to study the junior high school revised language arts curriculum. This involved talking to one of the chairmen, a committee member, and the contract writer of the Language Arts Ad Hoc Committee appointed by the Department of Education to revise the junior high school language arts curriculum guide.

The writing process approach was one focus of the document. From talking to the curriculum developers and the contract writer, I learned that my confusion about the implementation of the writing process was not an isolated case. Many teachers throughout Alberta had difficulty implementing the writing process approach. Why?

I believe there were several reasons. First of all, evaluation was seen as a problem. Some of my colleagues had trouble using the writing process approach because it was difficult to offer to parents the same kind of accountability they were used to, concerning their children's writing ability, since evaluating a process as opposed to a product could not be measured in terms of percentages or numbers. Secondly, because teachers had to understand the process in-depth in order to teach this method to their students, it was difficult to effectively in-service teachers.

Most importantly though, the major problem with teachers using the writing process approach in their language arts classrooms was one of their willingness to accept the philosophy behind this approach. In terms of the history of English teaching in Alberta, the writing process approach was a radical paradigm shift. Many English teachers felt comfortable with formal grammar teaching and testing. They were used to being in control of their classrooms in all aspects of English instruction, particularly writing instruction. To turn the onus for learning about writing over to the student writer was a foreign concept.

Possibly, some teachers had difficulty accepting the new thinking on writing instruction, because it had been a long time since they had written anything other than report cards or letters. If this was the case, it would be difficult for these teachers to remember what it was like to write from the point of view of a learner. I knew that it had been some time since I had written anything significant. It was hard to remember how much time and effort working through a piece of writing involved. I thought about my assignment deadlines for students and wondered if they were reasonable. Murray explains that:

> All writing is experimental in the beginning. It is an attempt to solve a problem, to find a meaning, to discover its own way towards meaning. We must learn, to teach writing, the necessity of failure and the advantage of failure. We are afraid to fail; our students are terrified by failure. (1985, p. 9)

I wasn't sure that I had given students the time or the freedom required to solve some of the problems that fully developing a piece of writing required.

No wonder teachers were having trouble. On the surface, the writing process approach to teaching writing had seemed like an easy solution! While it was comforting to discover that other language arts teachers were having difficulty teaching writing process as a writing strategy to their students, my discussions with the contract writer and two members of the committee served as a reminder of how difficult it is to teach writing effectively to students.

Perceiving Myself as a Writer

As part of the course requirement for our English curriculum and instruction class, we were expected to share our own writing. For the first time in my adult life I was expected to write on a regular basis and share with my peers what I had written. At the beginning the idea of sharing my writing with my colleagues was terrifying; but as the class continued, the time devoted to sharing writing threatened to take over the entire three hour seminar block of time, and there were only six of us in the class.

Our instructor, John Oster, wrote with us as one of us. Although we were required to write, we were not graded on our writing. We enthusiastically encouraged each other's writing contributions. One of my fellow students was an accomplished poet so we always had his excellent writing as an example to strive towards. Since we had deadlines, I found that finally I was able to complete stories. What's more, with the encouragement I was getting, I began to feel good about myself as a beginning writer! "And the perception of oneself as a writer -- as the kind of person who knows or will learn conventions of written language -- underlies the sensitivity to written language that every writer must have" (Smith, 1982, p. 55). Our class was putting into practice the methodology for writing instruction that all of these teacher/writer/educators promoted; it was working!

During the second year of my studies at the University of Alberta, I applied for and was given permission to register in an introductory fiction writing course taught by Rudy Wiebe. In order to be accepted for the course, students submitted a portfolio of writing to the instructor prior to the beginning of the course.

Rudy Wiebe's method of teaching writing was almost opposite to my other instructor's approach. There was a grade for this course based on Wiebe's evaluation of our writing during his course. We were expected to write four short stories in a one semester class.

Each week in a three hour block, the class would discuss some of the students' stories. Discussion was based on each individual's reactions to the person's writing under consideration that class period. The author was not allowed to clarify or respond. Therefore, the learning situation placed the student at his or her most vulnerable. I found that when my turn came to have my paper discussed collectively by the group without being able to respond until after that fact, I was nervous and uncomfortable because the group tended to be more critical than constructive. I was reminded of Tom Romano's words about sharing writing when he said that:

> To be honest on paper is difficult and risky, quite an accomplishment in itself. To then share those true words with others is a profound act of faith and trust. Such writing and sharing requires a willingness to become vulnerable. (1987, p. 39)

Following the discussion, Rudy Wiebe gave back a copy of the work examined by the group that day with his own notations and suggestions. The comments were extensive, and often personal. For example, a story was returned to me with a question asking what had happened to my writing during the period I had taken the class because the stories I submitted to enter the class had been superior. From the number of comments written on my papers, clearly this instructor had spent many hours reading over my work. I valued this commitment to my writing.

Taking a writing course from a recognized author was a new experience that allowed me to see writing from yet another perspective, that of the student writer learning from a writing teacher, in this case a published author. Our class was similar to a traditional writing classroom except that each student's writing was evaluated by the whole class. Rudy Wiebe did not share his writing with us. Unlike the unconditional acceptance from my previous instructor and my peers in the class, the pendulum swung the other direction in this class. I learned first hand what it felt like to receive negative feedback on a story I'd written. It was a rude awakening for me, and yet I knew that others might find the process beneficial. [For further information on how Wiebe and other authors teach writing, see Leah Fowler's (1989) master's thesis, Gifts from the tribe: The writing and teaching of five Canadian authors.]

These experiences made me keen to find out from student writers what their impressions were about how teachers responded to, and evaluated their writing. How did teachers treat student writers? Had I respected the privacy of my students' writing and recognized that writing was a personal act of expression that made the writer vulnerable? I wanted to learn more about the junior high writer.

A Rationale for Interviewing Student Writers and the Research Design

A literature search on writing studies at the junior high level revealed that little research had been done at this age level with regard to consulting students about their writing processes. Research on adolescents was primarily concerned with the social and emotional domains. There was a need for research about the writing processes of junior high students. How should I begin my study?

In the Nolan (1978) study "the deliberate choice of able writers was prompted by the view that much can be learned of the nature of a process from the study of subjects proficient in the performance of that process" (p. 24). Since I wanted to work with students who were keen enough about writing to engage in their own self-sponsored writing I wanted to interview able writers. How could I identify a group of able writers in the Edmonton area?

As a junior high language arts teacher I was aware of a one day long writing workshop held in Edmonton sponsored by the Edmonton Public and Separate School Boards, the Edmonton Public Library and the Authors' Guild of Alberta where students from Edmonton and surrounding areas could work with writers. Knowing that registration for the "3-2-1 Write" Conference was limited and that schools normally nominated students to attend, it seemed like a good place to start looking for junior high aged students who wrote. The assumption was that if students were sponsored by their schools they would either be gifted writers who had come to the teachers' attention or students who really enjoyed writing. In either case, for the purposes of my study I would consider these students to be able writers. Since my preferred teaching age was grade nine students, I chose to direct my study towards that age group.

Once I decided to interview junior high students who enjoyed writing, I concentrated on the issues and concerns I was primarily interested in learning more about. Benton (1982) had talked about the student's "mental space", and "the landscape of his [her] imagination, the sources of his [her] raw material and the nature of his [her] thinking." This was interesting to me because I believed that in order for students to succeed at writing in the classroom environment, teachers had to understand something of the thinking process that occured when students were writing.

Also, I believed from my own teaching experience that for students to be successful writers, they had to have opportunities in the classroom to work on specific skills in the context of their writing when the need for using these skills arose. Aulls (1986) spoke about the development of writing skills. He said that it depended on two factors which were first of all, "the important learning conditions in the environment," and secondly, "the relevant knowledge and strategies acquired and used by the learner to control or regulate the process of reading and writing for meaning" (p. 39). Knowing the many demands placed on a writing student by the circumstances of the classroom, I was curious to find out if there were certain factors or conditions that could positively or negatively affect a student's ability to write.

From my own experience as a struggling writer, I believed that writing was a creative act. Since early research findings suggested four recognizable stages in any creative act and these stages parallelled the stages Donald Murray identified, I was also interested in discovering from talking to able writers if they progressed through similar stages when they composed and if so how these stages could best be developed in the writing classroom. The kind of writing I was interested in was narrative writing.

Finally, from reading Janet Emig's work with the composing processes of twelfth graders, I was interested in working in some way with individual students in-depth. Emig's work with a case study approach and her focus on self-sponsored writing seemed appropriate.

Combining the area of thinking and writing with a belief that teachers have adopted the writing process approach without understanding its basic underlying rationale led to attempting to understand the thinking processes that occur when students are writing, so that writing instruction will be meaningful for students. I hoped that by talking to students who initiated their own writing outside the classroom, I might be able to find information about the kinds of activities and conditions that would encourage or inhibit the creative process of writing for all students.

The early title of my project became "Composing Processes of Grade 9 Able Writers in Self-Sponsored Narrative Writing". A proposal was developed to interview students who attended the one day 3-2-1 Write workshop. Carol Anne Inglis, a Language Arts Consultant for Edmonton Public Schools and one of the co-organizers of 3-2-1 Write, was most helpful. She suggested that I introduce one of the guests at the conference, Marilyn Halvorson, author of Cowboys Don't Cry. In this way I was able to attend and participate in the conference, which allowed me to have a common experience with the children I would interview.

Carol Anne Inglis also suggested that I contact the conference organizer, Iolani Domingo, at the Edmonton Public Library in order to obtain access to the lists of students registered for the conference. Once Iolani Domingo had provided me with the lists of students, I met with Anne Mulgrew, a consultant in Student Assessment, for Edmonton Public Schools, who assisted me to come up with a list of students representative of the Edmonton Public Schools. This meant that we chose schools based on the following considerations. First of all, the schools chosen represented a variety of economic levels as indicated by the average income of wage earners living within each school jurisdiction. Secondly, schools of different sized populations were chosen to provide variety. Also, another consideration was to include boys as well as girls, so schools who had sent both male and female students to attend 3-2-1 Write were chosen over school who had not. In the end, we had chosen sixteen students from six Edmonton schools. It was late in the school year and I was interested in interviewing students at the grade nine level. Therefore, I decided to hold the first interviews with students in grade eight at the end of the year, and the second interviews with the same group when they were in grade nine at the beginning of the following year.

I discussed my ideas with Margaret Stevenson, Supervisor of Language Arts Services for Edmonton Public Schools, who gave me valuable advice. At every step of the way I found encouragement and support.

As part of the research procedure, I planned to conduct a pilot study and decided on a former student who was an excellent writer named Kathy. Because Kathy was an experienced writer with whom I had rapport, her involvement might be more as a subjective participant than an objective interview subject. Kathy agreed to participate in the study. I would meet with Kathy at least twice in interview situations to come up with ideas about the kinds of questions to ask when I interviewed the students. Using Kathy in the pilot study would allow me to pose open-ended questions in order to encourage talk and discover directions for asking questions for the future interviews. The pilot study with Kathy would be Stage One of my project.

Stage Two would be the formal research project. This would consist of participating in the 3-2-1 Write Conference on April, 23, 1988, by introducing Marilyn Halvorson; obtaining formal permission from Edmonton Public School Board, individual schools, parents and students to interview the students twice; and conducting the interviews which would be taperecorded. At the end of the first interviews, students would be asked to keep writing journals over the summer.

The second interviews, to take place the following school year, would include follow-up questions concerning the journals. At that time, students would be asked to provide me with writing samples for discussion purposes. Questions at the second interviews would be formulated as a result of findings from the first interviews, as well as ideas from the interviews in the pilot study. I also planned to show students a piece of my writing and ask for their input.

Following the research, study results would be forwarded to participating schools, students, and the school board.

The Formal Research Begins

I attended the 3-2-1- Write Conference as planned, and spent the day with Marilyn Halvorson. It was interesting to watch Marilyn's presentation to her teenage audience. She established instant rapport with the student writers by reading to them a scene involving a motorcycle accident from her novel Cowboys Don't Cry and explaining that it happened to a former student of hers. Marilyn talked with the students about writing. She encouraged them to ask her questions about being an author. Together they talked about writing as writers. When Marilyn asked each group to write, every head immediately bowed and pencils and pens could be heard. These kids were confident writers.

The Ethics Review Committee at the University of Alberta, and the Research Officer at Edmonton Public School Board both gave permission for my research to proceed. I contacted principals from six schools in May of 1988 to get permission to contact the sixteen students and set up interviews. Next I sent letters explaining the study and permission forms to the students' parents. My first interview, at the end of May, was with Kathy, the grade ten student I was using for the pilot study. Following the interview with Kathy I revised some of my initial questions and interviewed the students chosen from the 3-2-1 conference who were in grade eight during June, 1988.

During these first interviews questions were selected from a previously written list, as well as from the student's comments during the interview. This method of interviewing was chosen in order to encourage talk and establish trust, and also to discover new ideas for future questions and investigation. I felt it was important to investigate some areas evident in the existing research further, but I also knew that listening to the students' ideas would help me strike out in areas I had not yet considered. As Graves (1983) recognized:

> Teachers can answer children's questions only if they know the writing process from both the inside and the outside. They know it from the inside because they work at their own writing; they know it from the outside because they are acquainted with research that shows what happens when people write. (Graves, p. 220)

My research of able student writers would enable me to learn what happened when these particular students wrote.

At the end of this first set of interviews, leather or cloth covered journals approximately three inches wide by five inches long were given to each student. The students were asked to jot down any ideas they had following the interview about writing in general, or any ideas they might have for writing stories. I chose attractive journals for the students rather than plain black ones in the hope that this might encourage students to write in them. Since the interviews were in June, I hoped that students might write in the journals during their summer holidays. I explained that I would interview the students following the summer and that I would be interested in the journals.

From July to October I typed the transcripts from the first interviews. The students were contacted and asked to bring their journals and a story that they had written to the second interview to discuss. In October, I completed the transcripts from the first set of interviews, categorized my impressions, and identified research questions to investigate in the second round of interviews which took place from November, 1988, to the end of January, 1989. I validated my questions with a second reader of the interviews.

One difference between these second interviews and the first ones was that I had asked the students to bring their journals and one piece of writing to discuss. This material became the focus of much of the second interview. A second difference with these interviews was that towards the end of the second interview, I showed the students a piece of my writing and asked them to ask any questions or make any comments. After each interview I recorded observations about the interviews.

A Conclusion to the Chapter

By the end of March, 1989, the transcripts from these interviews were typed. The data were analyzed for themes across the writers' experiences. A second reader verified my analyses. Since much of the incentive for my study had come from my own desire to experiment with writing, and since I believe that to effectively encourage students to write the teacher must also write, I chose to use the form of an autobiography for my thesis.

Chapter Three

What Able Teenage Writers Say about Their Composing Process

An Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter, "What Able Teenage Writers Say about Their Composing Process," contains questions and answers from the interviews on the following topics: students' histories as readers and writers; their current reading and writing habits; how they compose stories or poetry from the beginning idea to the final product including revision, and editing; the notion of "inspiration" and how it relates to these students' abilities to write; and school writing versus self-sponsored writing.

Each section in this chapter and the chapters that follow which deal with the student interviews is prefaced by a quote from one of these students. The quotes were chosen to remind the reader that a primary consideration of this thesis is what students say about writing.

Discovering a Reading History

> *My mother taught me to read before kindergarten because I always wanted to read. Everybody in my family reads a lot so I've always wanted to read. So as soon as I could I started to. By the time most people were reading, 'See Jane run', kind of thing I was into grade three or four material. It's always bothered my teachers a lot because I always read the textbooks a way ahead of time and I know all*

> *the stories so I can't make inferences on them in class. (Rebecca, interview one)*

Rebecca's account of learning to read at an early age was typical of the majority of the children in this study. Most indicated that they read from an early age. For example, Susan remembered reading the Nancy Drew mystery stories in grade two, "I usually finished a good book in a day. If it wasn't good, a week" (Susan, interview one).

One factor that may account for early reading development is the influence of parents and siblings. The majority of the students in this study indicated that as small children they were read to by their parents and other family members. For example, Caroline reminisced about her dad reading to her every night from a chapter of their special book. Every time he finished reading the book aloud, Caroline wanted her dad to start over again.

Some of the students in this study placed such importance on the correlation between being read to by family and learning to read that they believed that they had succeeded or failed at being early readers because of it. For example, Rowan talked of being read to until he learned to read in terms of a cause and effect relationship. Virginia remembered that she learned to read once her older sister no longer read to her. She explained,

> I was reading before kindergarten. I've got an older sister and she would read to me when she learned how to read. But then she got interested in other things in school. I guess she was in grade three or something and she got sick of reading to me. It was a pain. So I started trying to keep up with her and find out the stories, so I guess that's how I got started. (Virginia, interview one).

Jonathon said that because he was not read to by his parents, he had to wait until he attended school to learn to read.

Another interesting factor that may relate to early reading development is the oral tradition of storytelling. Some of the children mentioned that they were told stories at bedtime. Dal fondly remembered liking her mom's stories better than her dad's. She thought he probably talked too fast. Dena may have developed a sense of story by listening to the stories her parents told her, because she recalled changing their stories to suit her own ideas.

Finally, the ability to read easily may account for some students learning to read earlier than others. Tania mentioned that she learned to read in Polish first and was an early reader in her native tongue. She encountered difficulty with reading in English, however, and felt that she wasn't able to read in English as early as the other children in her class.

Discovering a Writing History.

> *I always wrote ever since I was little. I can't remember what age but I remember always trying to write things, starting books. They weren't very good but at least I wrote. (Eva, interview one)*

Students' answers to the question of what age they began writing varied. The majority remembered that they first wrote in elementary school, although like Eva, some students did not remember the exact age. However, these students remembered their first stories vividly. With one or two exceptions each student shared the topic and details of their first story. Many of these students were also able to list the stories they had written subsequently.

Three students' told experiences about beginning to write that are noteworthy because they illustrate how different factors affect students' abilities to write. In each of the three cases, students talked about learning to write and the influence of the school. While Darusha and Dena learned to write because of a teacher who encouraged them to overcome any difficulties that they had getting the ideas down on paper, Tania compared learning to write in a special program that offered a stimulating environment to the teacher-directed program she later encountered in the public system.

Darusha had an emotional block about writing as the result of an accident. Darusha remembered believing that she couldn't write. She explained that,

> I figured that I wasn't able to write because I had one of my arms burned. And the dumbest thing was I was burned on the left half of my body and yet I write with my right hand and I still figured I couldn't write. It's because my brain worked faster than my hands. I couldn't get my brain to slow down and I couldn't get my hands to speed up. (Darusha, interview one)

Darusha was able to overcome her problem thanks to the guidance of her grade four teacher who had the class write a play together. Darusha said the play was an enjoyable task; it was fun to write together and act out what the class had written. After her experience with the play, Darusha was able to write alone.

Dena did not start to write until grade eight. She explained that she had always had the stories in her head so there was no need to write them down.

> My mom says when I was younger, I never spoke baby talk. I always spoke in complete sentences, so...I don't know how many stories I've ever written down; I always had them in my head. It's just now

> I'm starting to get them down on paper. I would see people walking down the street, and I would think of their lives and make up stories behind them. I've always done that. (Dena, interview one)

Dena's experience suggests that she has not had opportunities to write in class before grade eight. Her grade eight teacher encouraged her to write and Dena enjoys writing. During the interviews Dena's enthusiasm towards writing was evident.

Tania attended a Waldorf School in the early grades and felt that the environment stimulated her to write. For example, the Waldorf School encouraged her to enjoy poets like Keats and experiment with her own poetry. Tania thought her experiences learning about poetry and experimenting with writing in grades four and five in the Waldorf School led to her ability to write poetry so well today. She explained that an important component of the program was that she was able to write about topics she chose. Tania was disappointed when she entered the public school system because she felt that in contrast to the Waldorf School, every aspect of her writing was controlled by the language arts teacher. Tania said that when the teacher directed her writing in this way it stifled her creativity.

Current Reading and Writing Habits

> *Always, my nose was always in a book and there was always a pencil in my hand. Always. I think I remember almost every book I've ever read, probably because I thoroughly enjoy almost every single book I've ever read. (Caroline, interview one)*

Only two students said they had no time to read. The rest of the students were like Caroline and read widely. Three students, two of them boys, preferred to read only young adult novels by authors such as Monica Hughes, the Star Wars series of books, and novels about teenage themes. The remainder of the students indicated reading preferences that included both young adult and adult novels. The types of novels most often mentioned were science fiction, mystery, fantasy, and horror. Stephen King and Agatha Christie were popular authors with this group of students.

Some students mentioned that they enjoyed rereading their favourite books. For example, Geoffrey explained that,

> I read a lot of mystery stories like the Hardy Boy books and that's where I get a lot of my ideas from. I've read some of them five or six times. Like we go to a secondhand book store to find Hardy Boy books and we get like we got eight of them one time and I was done them in a week. (Geoffrey, interview one)

Other students who talked about rereading favourite books were Rebecca who was currently reading the Anne of Green Gables series for the sixth time, and Dal who explained that the reason she reread books was because she didn't have the time necessary to seek out new authors. Dal said, "I don't have time to read very much. When I find books I like, I read them and read them" (Dal, interview one).

Finding Ideas to Write about

> *Things that happen to me, personal experiences . . . I went to California and we stayed in a tough area and there were a whole bunch of street people and I really liked it because they were so real and so fun and interesting, so I wrote about three stories and my oral speech on that, too. (Dal, interview one)*

Whether referring to something that happened at school that day, a conversation with a friend, a personal observation of something or someone, an event that provoked a strong personal reaction, or a trip somewhere, these students talked overwhelmingly about personal experiences triggering writing ideas.

For example, like Dal and her experience in California which led to several stories, Tania spoke at length about her year in China as a source for writing ideas. First of all, Tania found that there was so much that was new and different to observe and write about, and secondly that as a result of becoming aware of these differences she began to re-examine her own culture. This experience created new feelings which Tania wanted to express in writing. In Tania's words,

> I observe how people act and it's just that, well, in China it was such an experience for me because . . . it made my mind feel battered because I saw different ways of life, different ways of thinking. I've started to be very critical of things here . . . and that kind of thinking raises issues for me to write about in my stories to show other people . . . my point of view. (Tania, interview one)

Personal observation of something or someone around you was cited as a common source for ideas closer to home, too. For example, Pauline explained that she had to start with something she knew well, otherwise it was difficult for her to write. She often wrote about daily events. Therefore, some kinds of writing assigned at school were harder to write than others. For instance, she found writing fantasy stories really difficult. Dena also said that ideas came from being observant about the world around her. She explained, "something caught my eye on the way to school and I'll think about if for a few days and the story will develop in my head before I write anything" (Dena, interview one).

Feelings about events or issues were also mentioned as a source of ideas. For instance, Jonathon explained that after he fought with someone, he needed to write about the experience. Other students cited writing at school about Remembrance Day as an example of writing about an event where they held a strong opinion so ideas came easily.

Other sources for writing came from the imagination, daydreaming and dreams. "Well, I wrote about a nightmare," explained Chereen. "It was just describing this one part...I couldn't hear anything, couldn't see anything, couldn't smell anything, couldn't taste anything, couldn't feel anything"(interview one). From these powerful images in her dream Chereen wrote a poem.

Books, television and movies were another source of story ideas. Caroline explained that she enjoyed mixing the ideas from several books to create a new story idea. Eva said that when she read books like mysteries, she experimented with writing them. For several of the students movies and television provided ideas for stories. Rowan told the anecdote of having to watch the movie "A Tale of Two Cities" when his mother brought it home. Although Rowan thought he would hate the movie, he found that when he wrote his story for language arts the line, "It was the best of times and the worst of times" became the ending which pleased him since he had not expected to find such a smooth ending. However, two students were strongly opposed to using television as a source for story ideas because as Eva stated, "it's somebody else's ideas and I wouldn't want to steal ideas" (Eva, interview one).

Another source that triggered writing ideas was drawing. For example, Delvina explained "sometimes I draw and then it gives me ideas...people, just faces, trying to get the expressions. Sometimes that makes me want to write" (Delvina, interview one). In addition, Darusha told about an interesting strategy that she had worked out with a friend where they worked collaboratively to come up with a story character.

> A good friend of mine is an artist and she draws these things that we both come up with so I can take the physical characteristics from her drawings and the inner characteristics from my mind, and we put them together and you get an extremely likely character. (Delvina, interview one)

Finally, Caroline explained how a combination of daydreaming and doodling helped her find writing ideas.

> They just sort of pop up and I write them down really fast. . . . My dad scolds me for drawing in the creases and margins of my books but I still like writing and dreaming as if I were in a story of my own. (Caroline, interview one)

Rowan was the only student writer who used computer games to get story ideas. Rowan explained that he liked to create stories, particularly simulations which he turned into his own computer games. Rowan made the point that in order to write a fantasy story he didn't need to wait for an idea to trigger it; instead, he could begin developing the story knowing there was a basic formula. However, Rowan felt that to write other kinds of stories, he needed to find a more specific story idea first from which to develop the story.

One final source of story ideas given by these students was an idea that suddenly came to them with the the feeling that it would make a good story. The idea which these students often referred to as an "inspiration" arrived as only a germ of something which they then developed by immediately writing it through until it became something more substantial. Geoffrey explained this source in a poetic way when he said:

> And sometimes, sometimes it's like a musician, I have an inspiration and I try to find some paper and I write it down. . . . I just go straight to writing. And sometimes I've got to make a little bit of a

> mess, but I eventually get it. (Geoffrey, interview one)

When Geoffrey described this process he talked in terms of needing to capture the inspiration and quickly develop it or it would be lost. Several of the other students also described a similar need to keep the idea before it was lost forever.

Related to Geoffrey's emphasis of the need to capture good story ideas, several of the students volunteered that when their peers had difficulty writing they believed it was because they couldn't find good ideas, and didn't know the sources that other writers used. Tania talked about students who had difficulty finding ideas to write about, in terms of a bigger problem which was the lack of an environment that encouraged expression.

> Maybe some people don't have an environment or anything where they can express what they feel. It's like some parents sort of neglect their kids and they don't really communicate. And then it's hard to write because you've been bottled up all your life and you don't know how to unbottle it. So it depends on the environment and the type of person you are and if you observe things. (Tania, interview one)

Planning Versus Discovering as a Pre-Writing/Writing Strategy

> *I remember a teacher saying to create curious and just start from there. (Delvina, interview one)*

Delvina's suggestion of "creating curious and just starting [writing] from there" was very applicable to at least some aspect of the beginning writing processes of almost every student interviewed. The pre-writing strategies mentioned by these students ranged from starting from scratch without any idea for a story and writing to discover the idea to write about, to thinking the whole story through beforehand and then writing it down.

Dena was the only student who said that she was able to plan her entire story and "write it down just as it comes off the top of my head" (interview one).

> I always think and plan my story in my head first. Sometimes I've been thinking about something for days. Something caught my eye on t.v., . . . and I'll think about it for a few days and the story will develop in my head before I write anything. . . . and then if I feel like it, I'll write it down. I know what the story is. No outlines or anything. (Dena, interview one)

At the other end of the spectrum was Dal who spoke of discovering the initial story idea through automatic writing. Dal preferred to begin writing to discover a story idea which meant she did no pre-planning. Dal explained this process:

> Usually I just write and I get going and sometimes then I can tell if I can do good on this or not, and if I can't think of things what happens next, I don't use that. I just keep going until I find something. (Dal, interview one)

Some students used a combination of planning and discovering. For example, Darusha liked to plan the personalities of her characters beforehand, and to discover what the story would be about through writing it.

> First I get an idea of what I want to do then I sit down and think about what the characters are going to be and what their history is like, or if they're married or not, and usually that changes a little bit by the beginning of the story, so it's not a big deal

> and then I just start to write it. (Darusha, interview one)

However, the majority of the students started writing once they had an initial idea and discovered as they wrote. Rebecca explained this way of writing poetry,

> I just have an idea in my head and words start coming out that really express it so I just sit down and write it. Often I have to read the poem right afterwards to know what I've written because it seems kind of spilling out. Some words I don't know I've put down until afterwards. (Rebecca, interview one)

This strategy of intentionally "discovering" some aspect of the story was mentioned by every student but one, although the amount that each child chose to pre-plan or to "discover" varied with the individual.

Rowan and Geoffrey used the computer for writing. Rowan used the computer to continue writing a story once he had written an interesting beginning on paper. Rowan cited two advantages to using the computer as part of his composing process. Both of these involved being able to quickly locate material. First of all, Rowan liked to continually re-read what he had written before continuing his writing. Secondly, Rowan enjoyed scanning a story to see the length of each part.

When Geoffrey talked about using a word processor for composing he explained that he only used the computer for school writing but not for self-sponsored writing. Geoffrey made this distinction because he didn't "like to waste the word processor and the space on the disk," (Geoffrey, interview one) with his own writing. This suggests that Geoffrey viewed self-sponsored writing as involving more experimentation and being not as important as writing for school.

Tania also spoke of the distinction between school initiated and self-sponsored writing. Tania explained that with school assignments she pre-planned the entire story before she wrote anything down, but with her own writing Tania chose to discover story ideas through the writing. Another difference that Tania shared between writing for the school and self-sponsored writing was the use of an outline. For school writing assignments Tania wrote an outline, although it was written after the story was finished. This suggests that the teacher viewed writing outlines as important. Tania didn't use an outline for her own writing.

Susan was the only other student who mentioned using an outline to plan a story. Susan wrote an outline on those occasions when she was afraid of losing some of her ideas. She did not distinguish between using an outline for school or self-sponsored writing.

Writing Is a Matter of Finding and Keeping Good Ideas

> *If I didn't have an idea I couldn't write. I need an idea, then I sit down and write. (Susan, interview one).*

Susan's concern about finding and keeping ideas was echoed by nearly every student interviewed. For the students in this study, writing appears to be a procedure of finding ideas, developing ideas, revising ideas, going off in pursuit of new ideas, coming back to the beginning ideas if they are sound, or abandoning the story all together if the ideas do not continue to flow. This concern of finding and keeping good ideas affects all aspects of these students' writing.

These writers commented that a major source for good ideas was inspiration. They talked of waiting for a good idea to inspire them in order to begin writing. Some students, like Eva, explained that they couldn't write without an inspiration; others, like Susan, said that writing would continue as long as the inspiration lasted. Some aspect of inspiration was mentioned by every student although this differed according to each student's understanding of how people write. For example, Tania believed that a good idea might inspire her to write, but she was not afraid of losing the ability to write if she lost the idea. Tania also understood that there were many sources for ideas and that she could write for many different reasons, such as writing about her feelings when she visited China.

However, since good ideas were difficult to come by, some of these student writers, especially those who believed they had to be inspired to write, expressed the fear that they might lose their ideas. To cope with this problem of losing ideas, these students developed various strategies. For example, two students shared the fact that they wrote their ideas for story beginnings down and kept them in a safe place because "if you get an idea, why throw it away?" (Eva, interview one) In another case, Virginia was so concerned about writing fast enough to keep up with the rapid flow of her ideas that she developed a writing strategy so she wouldn't forget the words she wanted to use:

> I start thinking of the words too fast for the paper so I write half the words like 'the' would be just 'th'. . . . And then I have a problem at the end of copying it. I have little tiny words about this long. (Virginia, interview one)

Furthermore, Geoffrey was so afraid of losing his ideas that when an idea came to him, he sat down and wrote a story immediately. Geoffrey wrote until he became physically and mentally exhausted. Geoffrey explained that at some point during the writing, he usually discovered that the story was too long. He also said that he had lost parts of the story because he had not been able to write all the ideas down quickly enough. This feeling of being too tired to write explained Geoffrey's reluctance to return to the story at another time. Geoffrey believed that he had lost the inspiration to write, but he was also no longer motivated because the experience had become too difficult.

Rowan also was reluctant to continue working on a story after the first sitting. He explained that once he was finished with the original flow of story ideas he was finished with the story:

> Well the idea just comes all of a sudden in a matter of seconds and then I write and then I stop and then if I ever did go back to it, I think of ideas right then and there. . . . Once I've quit it's hard for me to go back. It's not often that I'd ever do that. (Rowan, interview one)

In Nolan's (1979) study the students were also afraid of losing ideas. Nolan found that "the majority of comments made by children concerned the searching for and selecting details to build up their stories" (p. 27). Perhaps if Rowan and Geoffrey talked to other writers about their fear of losing ideas they would understand where to find new ideas when their ideas ran out.

Other students said they would continue with stories if they felt good about the previous day's writing. For example, unlike Geoffrey, Tania and Dal also talked about writing until they were exhausted but they stopped when they became too tired; they felt that if they pushed themselves beyond a certain point it was no longer enjoyable to write. Both students also explained that if the original day's writing had merit, they would continue with the stories. Tania said she could tell if the story was worth pursuing by revisiting the beginning which " give[s] birth to my feeling again. . . . I feel like it's in me and I have to get it out. I feel that I'm enjoying it and I feel excited that it's going to come out into something good" (Tania, interview one).

For Eva, time played a major factor in whether or not she would finish a story that she had started previously. Eva knew that if she was able to commit the time to return at a later date, she would be able to finish the story.

> . . . Now with a short story I have to sit down and write something and the whole idea leaves my head and quits and the next day I go, sure I can add to this. . . . Sometimes when they're [ideas are] really good, I can sit down and write them into something more than a few sentences. I can get it done in a week or something. Most times it takes me longer than a week to get a story done. (Eva, interview one)

However, it was Caroline who spoke of intentionally leaving intervals of time between writing periods to get more ideas to use in her stories.

> Sometimes my mind will wander elsewhere and I'll go drawing and then go read another book, get other ideas and stuff and keep all these other ideas and then go back maybe a week later. It takes a long time for me. It seems to come out better in the end. (Caroline, interview one)

Tom Romano (1987) encourages teachers to give students time to develop their ideas, which he calls "percolating," in order that their writing might "come out better in the end" as Caroline has so aptly explained.

Nolan (1979) described his grade six able writers as using an "approach that involved a continuous process of solving problems to advance the plot" (p.29). The students in this study indicated that they also used an approach of continuous problem solving to advance the plot. However, the paramount problem that these students attempted to solve was how to find and keep enough good ideas to finish a story.

Revision Is a Natural Part of Writing the Original Story

> *I sit there thinking. I'd maybe get the first paragraph or so in my head and start writing that paragraph out, look for mistakes and go on to a second paragraph and another and another and another. Then when I feel it's finished right, I just finish it and put it in my binder and then decide to start writing more of it if I get more ideas. I take the paper out, and finish that page and go on to another page and so on. (Jonathon, interview one)*

To Jonathon, revision is a combination of revising and editing, since he makes both content and grammatical changes, with the latter being the more important. Jonathon pays strict attention to correctness while he composes. "I spell each word and if I'm not sure where a word goes," he explains, " I use a dictionary or ask somebody; then I spell that word and go on" (Jonathon, interview one). Working this way, Jonathon creates only one copy. Since Jonathon is so concerned with correctness while he writes, he sees no point in further revision afterwards.

When asked about revision Jonathon demonstrated a limited understanding. For example, he was not concerned with word choice or the flow of ideas when he revised. Instead, Jonathon talked strictly of correcting paragraphing and spelling errors. The majority of the students indicated that they were unsure of what revision was.

The composing process of writing, revising and writing again that Jonathon used was the same process mentioned by one third of the students. For instance, Pauline also used a process that incorporated revision and composing. However, Pauline concentrated on making structural changes as she wrote, instead of merely mechanical ones. Pauline is different than Jonathon because her technique involves listening to the piece as she writes in order to determine if it "sounds right". She explained:

> First I think about how it would work and then I try to incorporate it. . . . When I'm trying to figure it out, I probably do it [revise the writing] again and again until it sounds right. . . . Then after a while I'd read it again and then if it sounded wrong . . . if it didn't really go, then I'd just . . . forget it. But if it went o.k., or if it needed some changes . . . then I'd probably change it. (Pauline, interview one)

Pauline's method of reading aloud sections she had written to make sure the writing sounded right suggests at least on a subconscious level that she has a better understanding of revision than Jonathon.

Since revision is a necessary part of these students' composing processes, they see no need for revision as a separate stage. Students who write using this recursive pattern of writing, revising, writing again, have an intuitive understanding of the term that was not necessarily reflected in their responses when they were asked whether or not they revised. For example, as Pauline explained, she worked paragraph by paragraph to construct a story, reworking each paragraph until it was acceptable by making changes in her head and on the paper. Yet, when asked about revision, Pauline indicated that she did very little revising. Pauline's view of revision was typical for the majority of these students.

For writers who compose like Pauline, revision and editing are synonymous terms. They often correct anything that is a glaring error, whether it be a problem with the way ideas are stated or the way the piece sounds. For example, when Chereen was asked how she edited poetry, she explained that she looked at mechanics, better adjectives and whether or not to include metaphors, working with the poem until it "sounded right". Chereen's comments indicated that she viewed revision and editing as the same thing. Only Geoffrey mentioned the computer as a revision tool. He found it useful to fix up "minor messes," such as spelling errors.

Six students mentioned revising their work after they had finished writing as Geoffrey explained,

> Well, I write what I first had and then maybe I would leave it for a couple of days, or weeks or whatever and then I come back to it and I look it over again. I fix up all the errors. I then get new ideas and make a sort of second copy and then I fix it up one more time and just have it handed in or if it was an assignment or anything. So I do about three copies. (Geoffrey, interview one)

In their comments, these students differentiated between revision and editing when it came to writing a final copy which they usually did for school writing only. At this time they quickly looked for any significant errors which were typically mechanical.

There were two students who stood out as having a solid understanding of revision as a time to examine ideas. For example, Susan explained how she revised her work to even out the number of ideas in paragraphs Darusha explained, "I'm looking for the right word, the right flow, or the right feeling. Usually I just take out a word or two or add something" (interview one).

Part of some students' inability to distinguish between revision and editing may be due to the way that we as language arts teachers have introduced the terms to our students. The students in this study do not see the importance of revision. For example, they may feel that revision is unnecessary since they revise as they write. Editing, as a stage following revision where writers look for the kinds of errors a publisher would, is also misunderstood by these students. One reason for this may be that teachers use the practice of peer editing to mean revision. Pauline explained that in her class students exchanged papers half way through writing a story to proofread each other's copy. At this early stage students are only looking at each other's ideas, yet Pauline's teacher calls this process peer editing. If classroom teachers confuse the terms and do not explain the significance of revision, no wonder students like the students in this study are confused.

Why Some Students Are Reluctant to Change Their Texts

> *And after a while it seems like it gets sort of boring...maybe half way through it and you want to quit but I figure while I'll just leave it for awhile and then in a week or less I'll get really enthusiastic about it a whole bunch and then I'll go for it again. (Caroline, interview one)*

Some of these students equated revision with hard work. Although Virginia acknowledged that she had lost marks for technical problems, she said that she didn't want to spend more time editing because it was boring. Similarly, Dal explained that she made little changes, adding words or sometimes changing the ending, because to make more substantive changes required too much energy. Finally, Caroline explained that to write a story was a long process.

This is why Susan suggested some students might hate writing. Susan felt that for students who had bad spelling or mechanics or problems with having too many ideas and not knowing how to put them down, writing was frustrating. She remembered the unpleasant experience she had in grade three when her school thought Susan had a learning disability because her spelling was so poor. Susan said that because of difficulties with spelling she hated writing at that time. Now

Susan believed that the real problem was that she "had ten ideas for one idea and [I] couldn't write it all down . . . it would be a jumble" (interview one).

One difficulty students had with writing and revising, was that there was not enough intrinsic value for writing a story compared to the amount of hard work. Susan explained that "you hand it in, get a mark and that's it or you write it and it goes in a drawer. But if you have something like that [an audience] then you can work on it and aim for that" (interview one). Rowan was reluctant to act on a teacher's suggestions because "you write it how it seems natural, so when it's fixed just for grammatical stuff, it's grammatically better but it doesn't flow" (interview one).

Another deterrent to revision was shown by Geoffrey who was afraid to change too many ideas in the text in case it impeded the flow. The following transcript illustrated Geoffrey's fears:

> Geoffrey: If I make spelling errors or anything like that -- I just fix them up, but I only revise it twice.
>
> Interviewer: How come you only revise it twice?
>
> Geoffrey: If I do it more, I'm afraid that I'll lose the original idea so I do it twice to keep the original idea. It's hard to describe but I am afraid that it will become somebody else and not me. When I write it the first time I like to keep it as much to that as I can because it sounds like me. (interview one)

Geoffrey also made the point that he only revised twice using the computer which he used for school writing, although with his own writing he revised more than that. Geoffrey explained that this was because it was too easy to change the entire story using the computer. Geoffrey was afraid of losing the original creativity of the piece since he made changes so easily on the computer.

Other examples of a reluctance to revise for fear of losing the inspiration that began the writing were with children who favoured poetry. For instance, Rebecca wrote poetry but only added punctuation because she found that changing the words changed the overall poem. "It either changed the mood or it didn't express it properly" (interview one). Fears of losing the original intent of the writing or ownership of the piece may account for the fact that these students indicated that they seldom came back to a piece at a later date to do a rewrite.

Some students revised poetry and not stories; others revised stories, but not poetry. For example, Darusha said:

> I revise my poetry once it's written if the words don't seem to flow very well or just don't sound like they make a message any more. Sometimes I change my poetry around, but I don't usually change my stories. (Darusha, interview one)

Showing Others Your Writing to Help You Revise

> *You write it and the other person reads it cause you have to proofread and everything. Then they say, 'Ya that's a good idea, but mine is better', and it makes you feel, well like maybe you should change it, but you can't copy them, and you thought it was good. . . . When it's half done they might think it is bad but when you finished writing at the end of it, it'll probably be pretty good. (Pauline, interview one)*

Revising writing before the student is ready can lead to problems, partly because some students are very critical of their writing. Dena said that her writing "never seems good enough. It never seems as big and adventurous as I saw it in my head" (interview one). Tania was never happy with a story. "I'm very hard on myself," Tania said. "It's like my fault and I really want to prove things, and so that's why I'm trying to stop writing for other people" (interview one). Susan also felt critical of her work. She wrote four or five drafts of a story because "the first copy is a disaster; the second is okay; the third has major mistakes" (interview one). Rowan was reluctant to share his writing with anyone because his friends had already "read books so they would have something to compare it to" (interview one).

Sharing your writing with someone else requires a willingness to take suggestions. Many of the students felt this was difficult to do. For instance, Tania stated that she

> Always ask[s] tons and tons of people what they think and I use their suggestions but if everybody says that they really like it and somebody says that they don't, I'm mad at that person. . . . Like how is it that you don't like it? What's wrong with you?" (interview one)

In addition, Darusha believed that if people didn't like her stories it was because they did not understand them. Dal wanted suggestions but when people offerred them, she didn't want to use them. Caroline felt hurt if someone didn't like something she had written so she got a second or third opinion. Therefore, positive feedback was important, as Virginia attested:

> I usually use other people's suggestions because it's good to get somebody else's opinion, because you may find you understand the story because you made it up, but you didn't actually write enough details so that the reader can understand. . . . It's helpful. (Virginia, interview one)

Caroline liked positive feedback on her writing because it gave her confidence. "It sort of makes me go on further writing more and more and it gives me a really nice feeling having people read my work" (interview one). Many students shared their writing with their friends and their parents only.

Eva felt grateful when teachers found spelling or other mechanical errors. Geoffrey was willing to receive a piece of writing back with corrections and suggestions only at the initial stages of his writing.

> If I knock myself out on a project and I find it all corrected, I get really mad. If you're handing in a first copy, that they want just a rough idea and they want to touch it up a bit, that's o.k. But if it's a good copy and I knocked myself out for 16 hours on it, I do not want anybody to mess it up. I feel like finding the person and hitting them over the head with a brick. (interview one)

Whether or not students are willing to share their writing depends on how they feel about the piece and their willingness to trust the audience. For example, Susan explained that if she got a paper back with a low mark after she had worked hard on it, it was acceptable if the mark was based on mechanical errors. However, if the teacher had criticized her ideas that was different. Darusha noted that the criticism of ideas was a problem with peer editing. If a fellow student tried to put their ideas in her story Darusha says that was "an invasion of what's my idea" (interview one).

School Writing Is Different Than Self-Sponsored Writing

> *In school you're under pressure. . . . Whenever I'm working in school, it's always to get it done so that's why [I finish]. (Rowan, interview one)*

As mentioned by Rowan, finishing stories was one difference between writing for school and writing that was self-sponsored. Rowan's comment that at school he was under pressure to finish an assignment illustrates one major difference between the two types of writing situations; writing at school involves writing to meet a deadline. Students in this study frequently pointed out the difficulty of writing to fit assignment deadlines. These students felt that they were never given enough time to complete school assigned writing.

Emig (1971) cited the lack of appropriately assigned time a problem in her study of The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders. In particular, Emig noted that teachers provided very little pre-writing and revision time, and that some of the students in Emig's study spent as long as two years writing self-sponsored stories. Although finding deadlines that suit all students is a difficult task, teachers can become more realistic about placing too much pressure on students when assignments are not given within reasonable amounts of time. It was clear from talking to Rowan that he felt so much pressure from the fear of failing to complete the story in time that he was not motivated by anything else but time.

Another major difference was revision. With self-sponsored writing students revised depending on their understanding of what revision was and how they felt about the particular piece of writing. Dal and Virginia made the point that they only revised stories written for school. For these girls revision was too exhausting a process to do unless it was required. Geoffrey considered school writing good writing; therefore, he used the word processor for school writing and revised twice. To revise his own self-sponsored work on the computer was "wasting space on the disk." However, if students were writing for the teacher and felt that they would be marked for revising their work, they revised.

Other differences included writing preferences. For example, Rebecca chose to write poetry at home, but had to write stories at school. Emig (1971) found with her study that school sponsored writing was largely controlled by what the teacher valued and not students' preferences. Emig's findings indicated that teachers controlled the entire writing experience from choice of topic to the nature of the final product. Rebecca's preference for writing poetry may not have been considered as important as whatever type of writing was valued by the teacher. Poetry may not lend itself as well to the assignment that the teacher had in mind. Furthermore, Emig noted that school writing tended to be teacher directed towards the completion of a product. In a similar way, Rebecca's comments indicated that at school she had not been encouraged to experiment with poetry writing; once again the process may not have been as important to the teacher as the product was.

Tania wrote outlines and pre-planned the whole story in her head when she wrote for school assignments. Otherwise she preferred to discover the story as she wrote. Emig also found that with the twelfth graders in her study, pre-writing became merely outlining with regard to teacher assigned writing. Except for writing outlines, teachers did not consider pre-writing time necessary. The students in Emig's study seldom used outlines in self-sponsored writing.

These differences between writing for school and self-sponsored writing were only a few of the differences mentioned by students in this study. At all stages of writing, teacher-initiated writing appears to be different than self-sponsored writing for these students. Interestingly enough, although these students did not feel that they were given enough time to complete teacher-assigned writing, assignments that originated in school often lead to more in-depth writing at home. When students feel good about something they write for school, they may develop the piece into a poem, or write a longer or different piece later.

Throughout our discussions about self-sponsored writing versus school writing there was always the feeling that writing for school was work and writing for oneself was more fun. While teacher evaluation of school-assigned writing was the most obvious reason why writing at school was seen as work, other reasons seemed to relate to teacher-imposed restrictions on the whole writing situation from beginning to finish. These students had very little say in the process. Except for the physical act of writing, every decision made appeared to be made by the teacher.

A Conclusion to the Chapter

Chapter Three, "What Able Teenage Writers Say About Their Composing Process," began with students' early reading and writing history, to see if early home encouragement of literacy skills could explain in part their success as recognized writers in their schools. With one exception all students were read to or encouraged to read as pre-schoolers.

Early writing encouragement in the home varied with the individual. However, many of these students also wrote at an early age. An interesting phenomenon is that many of these students were able to remember when they first read and first wrote.

Questions were asked about their current reading habits to see if these students were enthusiastic readers as well as enthusiastic writers. The majority read and preferred reading adult material, although two of the boys enjoyed reading young adult novels. Some of these students reread favourite novels as many as six times. Some students indicated a preference for reading or collecting all novels in a series such as The Hardy Boys series, or by a particular author, like Stephen King.

Establishing a picture of current writing habits proved to be a more complex task. There was so much to talk about and students were keen to share their writing habits. Concern with finding and keeping original ideas was the number one writing priority.

With many of these students the ability to compose stories or poetry depended on whether or not the student felt inspired by the topic or was able to wait for an inspiration. This was particularly the case with poetry writing which was almost seen as writing that flowed directly from the subconscious in perfect form. Whether poetry or prose, writing continued as long as students were able to sustain the inspired thought or text, or until the piece was completed.

The belief by some of these students that writing was inspiration affected not only the way they saw themselves as writers, but the way they perceived the whole notion of the act of writing. For example, if a student believed that writing involved waiting for an inspired thought, revision was seen as a dangerous or unnecessary procedure because to revise was to tamper with an inspired original piece. As well as this perception of revision held by several students, how students regarded revision in general varied from students who revised as they wrote and saw no purpose in later revision, to students who undersood that writing was hard work and it might be necessary to continue to work with a piece of writing in order to feel satisfied with the final product. Several of these students also made distinctions between school and self-sponsored writing when it came to revision, choosing to revise for school writing and not with writing they initiated.

How students see revision and editing may be directly related to how we, as language arts teachers, present these skills to students. Comments by the students in this study contained in the sections on revision showed confusion about these two terms and the whole idea of revision. These students' understanding of revision and their willingness to revise writing appears to be directly related to whether or not their classroom teachers have explained the importance of revision and modelled for the students how and what to revise.

This section also demonstrated that teachers' reactions to students' writing affected the students' self-esteem as writers. These students were unhappy when teachers stressed the number and kinds of errors without commenting on ideas or providing suggestions for overall improvement. Feelings of success about stories or poems were often related to how these students perceived their teachers felt about their writing. Therefore, they tended to spend more time revising writing their teachers had reacted positively towards.

Perhaps the most significant point demonstrated by these students' comments as outlined in Chapter Three is how individual each child is in his or her composing process. Graves (1973), concluded that "writing is as variable as the child's personality" (p.237).

Chapter Four

How Able Teenage Writers Perceive Themselves as Writers

An Introduction to the Chapter

In order to comprehend the extent of these young writers' knowledge and experience with writing, I asked them questions about their strengths and weaknesses, signs of growth, and how they could improve. In addition, I was interested to discover whether or not the act of being interviewed had influenced the way they thought of themselves, if they knew about the sophisticated writing concept of "voice", and how they would answer the question, "Are you a writer?" Chapter Four presents their comments about the issues mentioned above. However, this chapter is primarily an attempt to learn about these students' perceptions of themselves as writers.

Writing Growth -- Have You Grown as a Writer Since Grade 8?

> *My awareness is quite a bit bigger now. In grade eight, I didn't think of writing. I didn't think, 'Dena, you have talent to be a writer.' I just thought, 'Well, you happen to get good grades. But I really have -- you know, become more open to poetry...it's always come naturally but I never really thought about it. Now I'm thinking about it. You know you should be writing a whole bunch of poems and try to write more....And before grade eight I wasn't writing -- it was just for school but now I'm really getting into writing. (Dena, interview two)*

Dena is aware of herself as a writer: she thinks about how to improve her writing, and she writes to please herself. This perception of Dena's, that she is a writer, allows her to think about her writing development in a broader way than students who have less commitment invested in writing. Dena is interested enough in her writing development to want to develop as a writer. When asked if they were writers, and if their writing showed growth, like Dena, the majority of these students answered "yes".

Yet, overall there were notable differences among the students' responses to whether or not their writing demonstrated growth over the previous year. For example, although Rowan felt that he had grown as a writer he wasn't sure how. In addition, Eva said that explaining growth was difficult because she only wrote for herself. Finally, Caroline was the only student who felt that her writing had not changed substantially since the previous year. Every other student spoke specifically about how they had grown. Their ability to talk intelligibly about writing growth was an indication of how knowledgeable about their own writing they are.

Most of the students gave different examples of specific ways they felt their writing had grown. For example, these students mentioned growth in terms of a wide range of areas, such as: writing about more mature topics, using symbolism effectively, writing better endings, including more details, learning how to use verb tenses appropriately, improving spelling, writing free verse poetry, writing more specific description, using better vocabulary, being willing to share writing, and writing more about their feelings. How these students have developed appears to be as individual as each student's writing. A few examples of the students' answers to the question of "Have you grown as a writer since grade eight?" follow. These examples were chosen for two reasons:

(1) to show how individual each student's answer is; and (2), to provide something of the rich texture these answers represent.

First of all, several students mentioned that they had grown as writers because they wrote about different subject material or wrote more mature content. In each case, however, their stories were different. For example, Darusha said she had grown because she used to write primarily mystery stories and now she writes about her own life experiences. She talked about recognizing the difficulty of writing a mystery story well and therefore making a conscious decision to change the stories she wrote to more familiar topics which she felt she could write better. From the way Darusha talked about this change it was clear she felt she had grown as a writer.

Rebecca also spoke of writing about different topics as a measure of growth but in a different context. Rebecca wrote about mature themes and interesting topics at home, because the topics at school were assigned, and she felt more superficial. Writing about more serious topics meant a change in writing maturity to Rebecca. She explained her change in writing topics, "I would write about surface things and now I seem to be writing about deeper meanings of things" (interview two). From Rebecca's comments, she recognizes that a conscious desire to write about what she prefers is also a measure of growth.

Delvina's reason for suggesting that changing a writing topic was a sign of growth was different again, because Delvina had started to write about inner feelings, and she said that for her this change of subject involved more thinking. This answer was similar to Geoffrey's response because he also felt that his writing involved more critical thinking now that he wrote about serious issues. Geoffrey found that he was able to use writing to think through problems. He explained,

> Well, I've broken away from the infatuation with science fiction. I mean it just doesn't interest me anymore as much as it used to. I decided to write on something I really care about a lot and that's being destroyed; and nature fits all those categories. . . . It's more realistic, too. Like science fiction, eventually it will come true but this is something that is happening right now. (interview two)

Geoffrey referred to a development firm that was building near his family cottage. He worried about whether or not the ecosystem would be endangered. To Geoffrey, writing about nature was important.

> We're nature preservers. We always have been. In our house we have a picture of bluejays on the wall. We tape nature shows and watch them. We have nests in our house because we live on the lake and we find old blackbird's nests and bring them in. We feed hummingbirds. (interview two).

He explained how an interest in nature was a fundamental aspect of his family's value system. Therefore, when he wrote about nature he was writing in a very personal way about his deepest feelings. This ability to write about matters that concerned him was one example that Geoffrey gave to indicate he had grown as a writer.

Other examples of writing growth demonstrated how varied the students' responses were. For example, Darusha mentioned being willing to share her writing as a significant sign of growth for her. "I've taken to actually showing the poems that I write, . . . to one or two of my very close friends 'cause they understand it and then they get a little bit more of a grip on me" (Darusha, interview two). This was interesting because Darusha had mentioned several times throughout the interviews that she was careful about who she showed her writing to, having encountered some unpleasant experiences in the past. Yet, she recognized this desire to share as a sign of growth.

Other examples of growth given by students included discovering new writing techniques. For instance, Darusha spoke of learning to use symbolism which she described as "more like poetry in prose" (interview two) to express her ideas on more than one level; and Jonathon was enthusiastic about his discovery of the technique of "comparison and contrast" (interview two) to express his ideas in a more concrete way.

In addition, two students mentioned that they had improved their spelling and grammar. Jonathon said he had learned how to use verbs, quotation marks, and commas to improve his writing. Susan explained that in the past she had "used wrong tenses . . . and placed things in the wrong places" (interview two). Susan said both her spelling and grammar had improved significantly.

Pauline, Geoffrey and Susan mentioned that their writing was more detailed and specific this year. For example, Pauline had worked with her teacher to make abstract details more specific; she felt this made her writing sound realistic. Also, Susan included more details in her stories which she said helped to fill in gaps in understanding. Finally, Geoffrey said he had learned to use more specific description in his writing to portray his characters. As an example, he referred to the following passage,

> *Swift Wind Jr. was every bit as beautiful as his dad. They had the same creamy sapphire eyes and black and silver fur. There was a hint of grey in Swift Wind Jr.'s silky fur.*

> Okay, I've got the description like '*hint of grey,*' '*creamy sapphire*', '*silky fur*', and I want them to have no question about my characters. (interview two)

Geoffrey was pleased that his description sounded like real life; he felt that using specific details had made his writing improve substantially.

Another indication of growth was mentioned by Virginia who said her writing was more interesting because her vocabulary had increased. Virginia also felt she had better ideas when it came to writing story beginnings. She explained how this could be interpreted as a sign of growth,.

> We did a study on that. . . . It turns out that you can look at how people progress. Like in elementary school, . . . the first stories you write are always 'Once upon a time'. Then it goes to 'One day', . . . and then you end up getting more exciting introductions. (interview two)

Finally, one other example of growth was given by Pauline who indicated that the more one wrote the better one became at writing. Pauline had found this true for herself with essay writing -- an area she said she had really improved. These examples were only a few of the answers given by these students to the question of how they had improved. The variety of answers given is interesting to note: the students appear to have a broad general knowledge base about many of the characteristics that make writing effective and are worth striving to develop, such as the ability to include specific details. These students' understanding of how their writing has changed is also worth mentioning. They are able to look at their writing in a critical way and recognize differences over how they wrote previously.

What Writing Problems Do You Have?

> *Sometimes you read a line and you know it just doesn't go along with the poem, or the voice and then you try and change it into other words which sound right together. (Delvina, interview two)*

The following section explains how these writers are also able to diagnose difficulties with their writing. Delvina referred to the difficulty of finding the right words to capture her feelings on paper. To Delvina and at least three other students, finding the "right word" was hard. For example, Dal talked about "finding a sentence" and then trying hard to "find the right word" because she liked using description but she wasn't always sure the word she was looking for was the most appropriate one. These students wanted their writing to sound natural and uncontrived. They worried about the tone and whether or not there was too much repetition of certain words. These were concerns they had about using the right word.

Related to finding the right word, the problem mentioned the most frequently by all students was whether or not their writing "sounded right" in general. If the writing didn't sound the way they felt it should, they were unhappy with the piece and quick to throw it out. For example, Jonathon said he switched topics often in the middle of what he was writing because he was unhappy with the way the ideas sounded. He would throw out poems even though he had worked hard to get them to sound right, because he no longer liked the topic. Susan was also highly critical of her writing if it didn't sound right. She explained, "Like I'll write it down, . . . and the next day I'll think, 'Oh that's silly!' Then I'll toss it away, and I'll start something else and the next day I'll think that's silly too" (interview two). Time and time again these students mentioned the importance of having their writing sound right.

As the students in this study explained, in order for writing to "sound right" good ideas were critical. They spoke of the importance of good ideas throughout the writing experience. For example, Susan said that although she thought of ten ideas before she wrote, when she sat down to write she had forgotten most of them, and discovering a good idea was a problem. Other students mentioned forgetting the idea or part of the idea once they began writing, as in both Virginia's and Dal's experiences. Virginia lost ideas because she could not write as fast as she thought. However, Dal suffered a different loss of momentum; the ideas weren't there once the beginning was written. Dal described this problem,

> I'm bad -- my strength is probably opening and then I just kind of die down. . . . I set the mood and then quit. I usually write a page or two pages for each story. That's it. (interview two)

Some students had problems thinking up the right idea to end a story. For example, Geoffrey had trouble finding a natural way to wind down a story because he didn't like stories to end too abruptly; whereas, Darusha was concerned with her endings sounding realistic.

An entirely different situation was mentioned by Rebecca, who said that finding good ideas was particularly hard when the writing was an assigned topic. She explained,

> Well, there's a Christmas poem that I wrote and I didn't know what to write. I couldn't think of any ideas and we had to hand it in in a few days and finally I wrote this poem. It's probably the poem I hated the most. I just hate it but I had to hand it in. He [the teacher] liked it, a lot of my friends like it, but I hated it because I had written it because I had to, not because I wanted to. . . . It's a little flimsy, rhyming poem. I hate rhyming poems but that was all that I could think of. (interview two)

Interestingly enough, although other people thought Rebecca's poem was well written, Rebecca didn't like it because of the way it sounded to her. In all of these examples, students mentioned the importance of listening to what they had written. Although they couldn't always explain why, these students were unhappy with their writing if it didn't sound right.

Although having good ideas and making sure the piece sounded right were the most frequently mentioned writing problems, other problems also surfaced. For example, one third of these students talked about writing in terms of self-discipline. Virginia said she was too active a person to sit down and write; besides, "coming up with ideas was hard work and boring" (interview two). Caroline intended to write but spent most of her free time on reading and drawing. Geoffrey had too much homework. Eva believed that she had trouble commiting herself to writing. Chereen felt that taking part in a school writing option would help her write more often because, "I'll probably have to learn to write more on demand. I can't really do that now" (interview two). The students who mentioned self-discipline as a writing problem believed they should write more to improve, but finding the time and being motivated to write were clearly obstacles for them.

Students mentioned other writing concerns. In terms of poetry, Dena wanted to learn how to use line breaks to highlight specific words. She felt she could be writing more effectively if she improved the form.

Other problems related specifically to short stories. For example, Geoffrey found it difficult to think up titles and names for the characters in his stories; whereas Dal wanted to develop her characters through effective dialogue instead of through the author's description. Finally, two students mentioned specific problems with working through the plot of a story. Rowan felt out of control with the length of his fantasy stories particularly since he was always trying to find ways to twist the plot and make it as original as he could. Concentrating on the intricasies of the plot meant that his stories could "go on and on" (interview two). On the other hand, Eva wanted to capture more of her dreams in writing but she was unsure of how to develop the ideas she found in dreams into a workable plot. For instance, Eva referred to a dream she had, about a lady with an egg embedded in her head, which she wanted to include in a story, but Eva explained that she didn't know how.

The majority of the students in this study were concerned with having enough good ideas so that their writing "sounded right". It was the number one concern. Other problems that students had with their writing involved self-discipline, using line breaks in poetry effectively, developing characters, thinking up titles and names, and working through problems in the development of a story. The next section discusses the ideas these students had to improve their writing.

How Could You Become a Better Writer?

> *I would like to widen my range of poems. Mostly I write free verse and that's it. It's the easiest. I wouldn't mind getting into more ballads, more structured kinds of things. Limericks, rhyming poems -- I'm not too good at writing rhyming poems -- like I can get the job done but nothing too serious. (Dena, interview two)*

As well as writing a wider range of kinds of poetry, Dena wanted to write poetry from different points of view. She thought it would be interesting to write poetry that sounded like it had been written by different poets. This ability to change the tone of her poetry was something that Dena thought would come with time and experience. However, for the present she planned to continue developing her own personal style. Dena explained,

> Like right now I'm just getting used to my own personal voice, my own uniqueness. I guess it's good to develop that, to have your own personal voice. So that if somebody did read your poem and knew you wrote it, that's good. (interview two)

Dena knew that writing took hard work. She said that to become a better writer she must read and write more.

When asked how they could become better writers, the majority of the students in this study said that they needed to read and write more. Generally, these students said if they read more, their vocabularies would improve. The students explained why reading was important. Caroline's advice was to "try to learn some new words or a new word every day" (interview two). Whereas, Rowan suggested that from reading one "unconsciously get(s) ideas, . . . and different words you're reading probably kick in" (Interview two).

It was not surprising that these students recognized a correlation between wide reading and being able to write well, because being enthusiastic writers they have learned that good ideas and appropriate vocabulary are necessary to write well. As Eva aptly said, "basically writing is telling a story in a colorful way. I think that's what it means. And if you have lots of words to work with, interesting words that people don't usually use, . . . it's real nice" (interview two).

Tania was the only student who said she read specific authors' works in order to emulate their styles. At the time she was interviewed, Tania was reading Margaret Lawrence and Margaret Atwood but she indicated that it was a common practice for her to read different authors in order to understand how to write. Tania explained that this allowed her to discover new ways to use words.

The majority of these students stressed that the key to improving writing was to practice. For instance, Rowan said to become a stronger writer he had to discover what areas to improve and what writing strategies to practice to help him improve. Another example of the kinds of comments these students gave to explain why they thought one should write more came from Virginia. She suggested, "the more you write the better you are because you pick up tips along the way." (interview two). Finally, in terms of writing practice Caroline suggested getting into a writing class.

Other areas that students planned to improve varied with the individual. For example, along with experimenting with writing poetry, Dena planned to finish short stories she had begun; because if it involved more than one sitting, she wouldn't finish. There were other areas Dena also wanted to improve. In general, she felt she could learn to write " . . . more maturely, . . . the wording, . . . the pace. . . . [Now] it [her writing] always seems very grade nine-ish and not mature enough for what I'm thinking" (interview two). Finally, Dena planned to send her writing to publishers because she wanted more specific feedback. This was important to Dena because she was used to being praised as a writer without being given constructive criticism; she felt she could benefit from an objective appraisal.

Other areas to improve were related to content. The following examples illustrate how different these areas could be for each student. For example, Jonathon said he would improve by writing about issues he was interested in, like free trade or an election, because issues involved "a lot of facts to focus on and facts make a story more interesting" (interview two). However, Susan thought she should learn to write down ideas she had daydreamed. Although, Tania also talked of writing about dreams, she was concerned that her present stories lacked magic. Tania remembered the dream journal she kept when she was in grade five. From her dreams she would jot down ideas to use in stories. In comparison to grade five, Tania felt her current stories "didn't have any magic in them" (interview two). This suggested that Tania would try and find ways to bring back some magic to her writing. Chereen said she should "do more things so I would have more to write about" (interview two). Virginia also knew that "experience in general, . . . influences you to write" (interview two). Therefore to become a better writer she would:

> Try more new things instead of just keeping on the same track that's worked out. . . . I could spend more time at it . . . and work a little harder on it. . . I try that a bit but it really depends on your mood and your motivation. (interview two)

These examples demonstrate that for some students changing the content of their writing was seen as one way to improve.

In many cases these students spoke of working on a particular part of their story. For instance, Dal said that some of her story endings needed major changes to make them more realistic. On the other hand, Pauline thought that she should concentrate on writing better beginnings.

Spelling and grammar were also mentioned on occasion. For instance, Susan and Rebecca were concerned with making too many spelling errors, and Geoffrey explained that he was not a "Harvard graduate of editing." In general however, the majority of these students did not indicate having major problems with spelling or grammar.

Three students mentioned interesting ways to improve their writing that reflected either working on personal habits or being motivated enough to seek out advice. First of all, Tania mentioned that she needed to set deadlines because otherwise writing was stressful for her in comparison to other activities. She explained that because she loved writing she would leave her chores, homework and other responsibilities to write. Tania felt that she could reduce her stress by being more responsible about setting deadlines for herself.

> My self-esteem wouldn't be gnawing at me. I shouldn't be doing this. I should be doing something else. I shouldn't be writing because I haven't done something else. I shouldn't be writing because I haven't done my homework. So, if I was totally free of stress then my writing would be better. I would be more relaxed. (interview two)

Geoffrey also suggested a way to improve which required self-discipline and concentration; he said he could be more focused when he wrote. He explained that if he concentrated more on thinking about ways to solve some of his difficulties he would improve; he had found that "the more thought he put into it, the easier it was to come up with titles, rhymes, beginnings, and endings" (interview two). Finally, Caroline said she was lucky to have a writer in the family since her grandfather was a published author. She planned to ask him how he got started and if there was information he could give her to help her writing improve.

When asked how they could improve their writing, two students Darusha and Rowan responded by saying they were happy with the way their writing was progressing. They didn't offer any suggestions because they felt no need to improve.

With the possible exception of Darusha and Rowan, all of the students appeared to be aware of ways to improve their writing practice. They suggested the following methods to accomplish this: wide reading; writing about areas of personal knowledge or experience; thinking hard about how to improve and then concentrating on improving those areas; sharing writing with others for objective critical appraisal; being self-disciplined and motivated to find the time to write; improving grammar, spelling and other editing errors; talking to other writers about writing; and having the tenacity to finish pieces of writing. These comments suggest that given the opportunity and assistance from teachers these able writers could develop their writing on an individual basis according to need because they have definite ideas about how they feel they could improve. Interestingly enough, the suggestions for improvement given by these young writers are no different than those offered by Joy Kogawa, Timothy Findley, Michael Ondattje and Donald Murray when I heard them asked the same question at lectures I attended.

Did the First Interview Change Your Perception of Yourself as a Writer?

> *I never really thought about writing until you came in. I always knew that I'm going to write a book some day but I never really thought, you know, I should be writing. 'Cause if I had talent, I should develop it. . . . And so right now since I've done some stuff this year, I don't know if I'm doing good, I would like to expand a lot more. . . . But I did write some poems. I'm not sure which ones. But I sort of got inspired last time -- just the idea of writing -- after talking with you. Yeah. I started thinking. (Dena, interview two).*

Caroline, Virginia, Pauline, Darusha, and Jonathon answered "No", to whether they thought differently about themselves as writers after the initial interviews. However, as Dena showed in the quote above, the majority of the students said the interview had made them think more about writing. A few examples are presented to show how this opportunity to talk one-on-one with an adult about writing may have increased some of these students' perceptions of themselves as writers.

First of all, although Dal thought more strongly of herself as a writer after our first interview, she qualified this by saying that she had always been told by her peers, parents and teachers that she was a good writer and talking with me about her writing just substantiated for her some of her thinking about what others had said.

Eva explained that she had never thought of herself as a writer before but now she felt somewhat differently because:

> I never thought a person who's never had anything published is a writer. I always thought that a person has to have a book published.
>
> Interviewer: And now?
>
> Eva: I think now if you write and if you finish what you write, then you're a writer. (Eva, interview two)

Susan, Chereen, and Rebecca said that after the first interview they took writing more seriously. Susan explained, "Before I just kind of thought of ideas and wrote them down and now I think, 'Well actually, I could do something with that idea '" (interview two).

At the time of the first interview, Geoffrey was busy working for his father at home and his uncle at the farm. He wrote as often as he could, but Geoffrey said it was just too hard to find enough time to write. However, Geoffrey said that being interviewed made him think more about writing even though he wasn't actually writing. "Then when I started writing this year," he explained, "everything just sort of exploded" (interview two).

Tania said the main difference for her was that being interviewed made her feel more objective about writing.

> It gave me a more objective view. It made more sense. I was confused before because I didn't know anything about writing or how I felt about it. I just wrote, . . . I'm trying to develop my style. It's not a selfish thing just feeling like writing but now I want to make it better and so I read much more and I'm trying to learn -- trying to soak up some of the points of Alice Munro and Margaret Atwood and Margaret Lawrence. I'm just trying to experiment with the different writers. (interview two)

The majority of these students indicated that being selected by their teachers and interviewed about writing for this study had made them feel more credible as writers. In several cases being interviewed gave credence to what the student already knew but had been modest about discussing, that she or he was a talented young writer. With others, the questions asked during the interviews helped them think in a concrete way about their style and personal writing ideosyncrasies. For example, some students questioned why they preferred to write about particular topics or use certain forms. The interview process may have helped Geoffrey realize that he enjoyed writing and it was an important activity for him, because Geoffrey commented that when he started writing again "everything just sort of exploded" (interview two).

Voice

> *Every writer is as personal as a fingerprint. (Geoffrey, interview two).*

Although from this quote of Geoffrey's he appears to understand that writing is a personal form of expression, when it came to being queried about what the term "voice" meant, he was hesitant to venture an opinion saying "Voice is probably the way you relate the story " (interview two). I found this an interesting response because Geoffrey was on the verge of understanding what voice was, yet he answered quickly and wanted to get on with the other questions. He appeared to be unsure of his answer and yet I knew from our conversations that Geoffrey was able to talk in a knowledgeable way about writing. For example, he could discuss at length qualities about his own writing that made it uniquely his. On the other hand, Jonathon who was reticient about discussing writing in anything but the most cursory way, answered the question, "Can you tell me what is meant in writing by the term 'voice'?" With confidence he said, "I think it is when you have a story told almost like the person is telling the story " (interview two). Through further discussion about voice it seemed that Jonathon understood the concept and had offered a definition that worked. I wondered if Jonathon knew more about writing than he chose to demonstrate. Every other student had answered "No", to the question.

I was curious to discover if the students had a more intuitive understanding of voice but were unfamiliar with the term. Therefore, I asked them if they could recognize a page of Stephen King's writing if the author's name were omitted. Everyone said they could and most volunteered to describe some of the characteristics that made Stephen King's writing unique. From this example we discussed "voice" and I asked each student for a second time to explain voice in his or her own way. This time the answers were much more encouraging. Darusha's answer is included here to show how fascinating the thought process was that she used and to demonstrate her level of understanding of the concept. Initially Darusha said that voice was "the way things sound." Then she decided, "It's sort of a meaning, a point, a message," and later, "like a personality type thing." Finally still without prompting but using Stephen King's writing as an example, she came up with "Voice is sort of like a signature" (interview two). Her answer is interesting because she used what she knew about Stephen King's writing and writing in general to solve the problem of an unfamiliar term. She has also come up with an excellent way of describing voice. Eva also answered in a way that convinced me she understood the term on a practical level. She decided that "you don't have to meet the author but you know them from what they write or how they write. That's what it [voice] is" (interview two).

Professional writers talk of developing voice as an integral part of becoming a writer. It is a sophisticated idea for non-writers to understand. If these students had been familiar with the term, it might have meant that they had achieved a level of writing that was significantly above their peers in the classroom. However, only Jonathon could tell me at first what voice meant. Once we started discussing the term in more depth almost all of these students quickly arrived at definitions similar to those given by Darusha and Eva. This meant that these writers understood the concept of voice: although they were unfamiliar with the term, they knew it in practice.

I wanted to discover if they really could talk about their own writing in terms of whether or not it had a clearly recognizable voice. From students answers to the question, "What makes your writing your own?", it was clear that each writer could describe characteristics in his or her own writing that made it unique. The majority of the students also agreed that the teacher or a classmate would know their writing if asked to choose a poem or story from several papers without names; they agreed their writing had a recognizable voice.

Most students explained their individuality as writers in connection with writing style. For example, Rowan said his classmates knew his stories because they were action packed and lacked explanations. "You never know what's happening in a story, so you have to read another page and find out why that happened" (interview two). He added that he developed his characters by inventing their voices and imagining how they would actually sound. Rowan purposely tried to make his writing "uncolorful" (interview two). Pauline also described her voice in terms of style by explaining that she told her stories backwards starting with an event and then telling the beginning to fill in the rest of the story.

Another way of talking about voice commonly used by these students was to comment on their word choice as in the following example.

> You could say my writing has a voice . . . because my wording is not exotic or anything. . . .I put a few words in there; I use some words -- a lot of description . . . like the way I write, . . .everything that makes up the story . . . the teacher would know. (Dal, interview two)

Then Dal gave these examples of story beginnings she had written to demonstrate how certain words she used distinguished her voice from other writers,

> I like to go right into the beginning, like: *"I couldn't stand seeing all those people thoroughly enjoying life while I sat cold and clammy",* 'or *"It was a harmless drop of water to most, but a murderer to me."* (interview two)

Dena also felt her choice of words was unusual because she liked her writing to sound sarcastic. Furthermore, she believed that although her short stories didn't sound like her, her poems did. Dena was comfortable with what her voice sounded like now; but she wanted to broaden the way her writing sounded, "so [that] it sounds like different people writing from different points of view" (interview two).

The third most common method of describing what was unique about a student's voice had to do with whether or not feelings were included. Rebecca said that her writing had a recognizable voice when she held strong feelings about particular issues and wrote about them:

> Because I've kind of got two sides to my personality. One, I'm smiling and jumping and all that, and then I can get really serious all of a sudden about certain issues and in my writing it seems to attract my serious side, so I've got a very serious writing style. I don't want to write about little silly things that don't mean anything. I want people to start thinking or to learn something from my poems. (interview two).

Two other students indicated that if they wrote about their feelings their writing had a definite voice. First of all, Virginia said her interpretation of a topic, and the way she chose to write about subjects like war from an unusual side, made her voice different. Caroline also said that it depended on what she wrote whether or not her writing had a strong voice. "If I wrote about my feelings, then 'yes'. If I wrote out something like a story, I don't think so, because my stories are totally different" (interview two).

Other students made unusual observations about the concept of "voice". Tania commented that writing assigned for school lacked her own ideas and therefore did not have her voice, whereas Tania believed writing that was self-initiated did. Jonathon said his writing was different from other students in his class because it sounded alive, whereas his classmates' writing is "like a dead story. . . . It's flat, there's no anything in it" (interview two).

Finally, Susan and Darusha were the only students who said their writing did not have a definite "voice". Both said this was because they didn't "stick to one kind of writing."

(interview two). Darusha qualified this further by saying her story writing didn't sound like her " . . . because I do things differently depending on what my mood is. I have a mercurial temperament" (interview two). Yet, Darusha felt her poetry was usually recognizable because "it always rhymes and it always has something to do with either confusion, love or hate, or all three combined" (interview two).

Susan was interesting because although she was convinced that her writing did not have a voice, she volunteered that her classmate Dena's writing did, because "lately she's been writing depressing stories, poetry. . . I remember she just wrote for an assignment and handed it in and you could tell it was Dena's" (interview two).

Are You a Writer?

> *Yes. Because I write things other people enjoy and I've helped a few people through writing. . . . About half way through grade eight I started considering myself a writer. In grade 7 , it was more like I'm writing things for school and it started off that way in grade eight but then I slowly began to think of myself as a writer. (Rebecca, interview two)*

Ten of the students thought of themselves as writers for various reasons. A few of their comments are included to represent why they thought of themselves in this way and how it has made a difference. In Rebecca's situation the recognition of her classmates has helped her see herself as a writer. Other signs of Rebecca's ability to write have been linked to recognition at the school level since she has won school contests. One contest in particular affected Rebecca; she submitted a poem to a school contest and won the chance to attend a full afternoon of editing with an author. Rebecca explained that recognition from others has helped her be more confident about her writing,

> I was afraid that somebody would laugh . . . but now that I've got compliments on my writing if somebody does laugh at my poems,. . . it doesn't bother me because that is the way they look at it and they are entitled to their opinion. (interview two)

Dena thought of herself as a writer because she has "always been able to put words together better than other kids" (interview two). She knows her writing is better than others. Dena's grade seven teacher influenced her to want to write and then Dena said that when she was interviewed for this study, she started thinking of herself as a writer:

> It all came together. Well, I've always been a writer, anybody can be a writer, but to be able to really write well . . . and I think you know if I have enough time I could become a great writer some day (interview two).

Tania gave a different reason for saying she was a writer, "I know how to put my feelings on paper and I enjoy doing it and I get results" (interview two). She also derives a sense of self-satisfaction from writing.

> I really enjoy it [writing] and it tells me who I am and it's kind of -- I have a drive for excellence sort of and that makes me feel good when I accomplish something like that. . . . It [writing] really makes me feel good. (interview two)

In this case it sounds like Tania receives an intrinsic satisfaction from writing. She may have reached a stage in her writing where the sense of accomplishment from writing something well inspires her to continue.

Another example of why a student might think of herself as a writer is if she started writing at an early age. Darusha explained that she started writing poems in grade four.

> The first poem I wrote I gave to the Library Aide. We were all good friends, right? And her son also wrote poetry and I gave the poem to her and she said, 'Oh, where did you find this?' And I'm like, 'Tee hee. I wrote it!' and she said, 'You did?' and I said, 'Yeah', and she picked it up. And I think it's still one of the best I've written. I wrote it in grade four. (interview two)

The fact that she started writing so early was significant to Darusha. The students explained that although they might think of themselves as writers, they had other talents that represented a bigger picture of who they were. For example, Darusha explained that although she was a writer she was first and foremost an artist.

> Yeah, I think of myself as a writer, but not as much as I think of myself as an artist. Because I'm an artist in lots of ways. I'm an artist with words. I'm an artist with my body because I'm an actor. . . . So I think of myself as a writer and I think of myself as an actor but most of all, I think of myself as an artist. (Darusha, interview two)

Darusha's answer was a colourful one; she described herself in a way that was not limited. Caroline also described herself as an artist rather than strictly a writer, although she was an, "aspiring artist and writer." She said, "I am a young artist, aspiring artist, an artist to be, maybe that would be more fitting, . . . and a writer to be as well" (interview two).

Writers were also seen as accomplished adults. Caroline was not a writer because of her age. "I tend to think of writers as grown up because I don't know, it's just there are not as many writers my age" (interview two). I suspect that

Caroline had not had exposure to reading the published works of younger writers.

Other students qualified their answers explaining that although they wrote, they were not professional writers. For example, Virginia was an amateur writer, "not a writer writer" (interview two), "Cause I never really write things as a writer would, like really get into it, and do a lot of research, and so I'm more like an amateur writer." Virginia tied being a writer to conducting research and working hard. Similarly, Geoffrey felt he was not a "true writer" because he lacked dedication. Geoffrey said that:

> A true writer always writes . . . whenever they have spare time. And whenever I have spare time I don't spend it sitting at my desk writing. I like to bike ride and anything any other 14 or 15 year old boy wants to do. (interview two)

Geoffrey said that a writer was committed to writing in such a way that he would make sacrifices like giving up bike riding in order to write. Both students saw writers as people dedicated to working hard to perfect their craft.

Some students said that writers were people who produced writing regularly and had their writing published. For instance, Chereen had "not written too much recently" so she was not a writer. However, last year she wrote more and saw herself as a writer then. In addition, Susan said "Well to be a writer you have to spend a lot of time in actually writing and like your work and maybe show people and maybe if you can get it published. . . . But I really don't do much of that" (interview two).

A Conclusion to the Chapter

This chapter "How Able Teenage Writers Perceive Themselves as Writers," related students' comments on the following: whether or not they had grown as writers since grade eight, what writing problems they had, how they could become better writers, if they felt more like writers after being interviewed, the concept of "voice", and if they considered themselves to be writers. These areas were discussed in order to try and piece together a picture of what perceptions these students held about their ability to write.

In the first section on writing growth these students were able to talk intelligibly about how they they had grown as writers. Some of the reasons given were using more precise vocabulary; writing on mature topics; voluntarily sharing writing; writing better endings; using symbolism, and other new writing techniques, to present ideas; improving spelling; experimenting with different genres; using more specific details; creating more developed characters; finishing stories; writing more often; and understanding and using grammar effectively to edit and improve their writing.

Similarly, in the section, "What Writing Problems Do You Have?" they cited: finding the right words to capture feelings on paper, coming up with original ideas and enough ideas to complete the story, writing exciting beginnings, using realistic description, writing in a way that sounds natural, thinking up good endings, being self-disciplined enough to finish a story, using dialogue effectively, and learning how to use line breaks appropriately when writing poetry.

The fact that these students were also knowledgeable about how to improve their writing was evident by the suggestions given in "How Could You Become a Better Writer?" Reading widely and writing often were the most popular answers to improving writing. These students also mentioned reading what other students had written; finding others to help them critique their writing and then learning strategies to support specific weaknesses; having their writing published;

working hard to improve spelling, grammar, and vocabulary; and experimenting with a wider range of kinds of writing.

The sections on "Did the First Interview Change Your Perception of Yourself as a Writer?", "Voice", and "Are You a Writer?" indicated that these students possessed knowledge about writing that was sometimes more on an intuitive than a conscious level. In other words, on occasion these students did not have the vocabulary or experience talking with others about their writing that was necessary to convey all that they knew. Instead they drew on examples from books they had read, and made specific references to their own writing to explain what they knew about concepts like "voice" without being aware of terminology.

The picture that emerged from comments made by these students about their perceptions of themselves as writers is one of an articulate group of young writers who are knowledgeable about strengths, weaknesses and ways to improve. Several students felt that being chosen to be interviewed and then discussing issues about writing in an adult way had consolidated feelings that they already had about being talented writers. Most of these young writers were interested in learning about voice, wanted to explore the concept, and came up with interesting definitions that showed they understood it. In the majority of cases these students thought of themselves as writers because they knew they could write well, had been told by others that they were talented, and wanted to continue writing because they felt a sense of personal satisfaction. These students also told me that they were more than writers. Some said they were mathematicians, readers, artists, and average teenagers who liked to do teenage things, reminding me of how complex and full of life adolescents really are.

Chapter Five

Able Teenage Writers Share Their Writing

An Introduction to the Chapter

Students were asked to bring a piece of writing they were comfortable with sharing and the journals they had been given to the second interview. At the interview each student was asked to find a sentence, paragraph or section of the piece of writing that they liked and to explain why they liked it. For example, when asked "Find something that you've written that you like," Dena shared the lines, *"There are empty summer chairs arranged in the way that the moonlight creatures like to sit in them, one at a time"* (from "The Most Wonderful Snow in the World" winning entry, grade 7, School Writing Contest). When asked why she liked this section Dena replied,

> From my bedroom window I can see into the backyard and I can see our lawnchairs, and sometimes at night when the moon is shining it's really wierd. It's blue. The chairs look like furniture in the snow. It's like there are little moonlight creatures there. (interview two)

I soon discovered that most of the students in this study were enthusiastic to share several pieces of their writing. In a couple of instances, students who were hesitant about showing me their writing and hadn't brought more than a single piece found they enjoyed discussing specific pieces they were working on even if they hadn't brought them with them. In a few cases, the interviews went overtime and I finally had to say, "Thank you very much but our interview is over."

Therefore, I amassed an extensive collection of data in response to this one question.

For this reason, included here are representative samples of some of the comments students made about their writing. I have chosen particular items in an attempt to show unusual ways the students talked about writing or ideas they suggested that seemed original, with the hope that, as teachers, we may find new insights into teaching writing. Also represented here are those students in this study who were reluctant to show me writing. Their comments are also valuable because many students in our classrooms are equally hesitant about sharing their writing, whatever the reasons. Finally, following a few of each student's comments, there is a section which summarizes the findings for similarities and differences.

Find Something That You've Written That You Like and Tell Me Why You Like It

Highway Car

The zoom zoom and boom of a speeding car
Along the angry highway at night
Tingles my heart,
The bright stars are passed
In seconds
Even though light years separate us ...

Coming around a curve at an impossible speed,
I see --
Another blinding light
In front of me for a thousandth
Of a second,
Until I see
No more ...

by Dena

In terms of her willingness to share, Dena appeared to be the most prolific writer. Along with the poem referred to in the introduction and "Highway Car" above, Dena arrived with a full writing folder of poetry and other miscellaneous works.

In "Highway Car", Dena said she had recaptured feelings about being nervous on a family drive. She wrote the poem at the end of the outing "so the feelings were fresh." Phrases she highlighted were *"tingles my heart"* and *"the angry highway,"* which Dena liked because they epitomized her feelings. By writing the poem she said she felt better about the trip.

Paul Torrance (1986) discussed the use of writing for a therapeutic purpose in relation to his feelings about the Challenger Space Shuttle tragedy. The loss of a close personal friend on board the shuttle created in Torrance an intense desire to write even though he was unable to, due to a stroke. Overwhelmed by the need to explore his feelings, Torrance found he was able to write. In fact, he said the story "wrote itself". For Torrance, relief immediately followed. He explained:

> No matter how you define creative expression, we are dealing with one of mankind's strongest needs. New experiences for which we do not have a practiced, known solution always call forth this need. When an emergency or intensely emotional experience occurs it may be a survival need. (p. 37)

Dena's poem "Highway Car" called forth the need in Dena to express her fears in writing.

It was important for Dena that her writing represented real life whether in a situation like the one mentioned in "Highway Car", or in other poetry that dealt with real life issues. For example, in several of her poems Dena explored the theme of death. "I Think of Death in My Sorrow" was a poem that dealt with suicide. Dena liked the message in the line, *"I will force myself into the only kind of possible help for me now -- death,"* because it "had a lot of thought in it," and explained that for some people "suicide was a kind of hope." Another poem which dealt with death was "Song of the Leaves." Again Dena was pleased with the way the poem conveyed a central idea about life and death, because in this poem she equated leaves "shrivelling up and crumpling into a brown dust" with dying. Yet, a kind of hope was also present in this poem because the poem ended with the wind goddess collecting the dust to be used for next spring's leaves.

From these examples Dena demonstrated her interest in writing on a metaphorical level. Several times she chose lines that had more than one meaning as her favourites. Dena thought it was interesting when she shared "I Think of Death in my Sorrow" with her dad; he interpreted the poem to mean physical pain, when she meant mental anguish instead. She wanted people to read her poetry and relate to the way she had presented her ideas. She preferred poetry since it was a form that allowed her to experiment with adult themes in a meaningful way. (Dena was quick to reassure me that although she wanted to explore the theme of death, she was a well adjusted teenager.)

The only writing Dena brought that she was unhappy with was her love poetry. She said that since she hadn't experienced romantic love yet, she couldn't write convincingly about love. Dena knew that writing from experience made her writing authentic.

Finally, when I asked Dena what changes she would make to her writing, she wanted to learn how to use line breaks effectively when writing poetry. She explained, "Right now my lines are just sort of part of the poem and each line should stand by itself and mean something by itself," (interview two). The other change Dena wanted was to add more details in cases where she wasn't sure the reader understood the metaphors.

Tania also preferred to write poetry and had written poems about adult themes. She brought a poetry booklet to the interview which had beautifully decorated pages; it had been on display in the library. Although Tania told me she had written a great deal over the summer and early fall, there was no evidence of her more recent work.

The first poem she chose to share was called "The Tragedy". It was a poem which represented a dream Tania had about an incident where her grandmother rode a bus and was visited by "Death", a fellow passenger who sat down beside her. Tania pointed out that Death invited her grandmother to tea; and since the visit was a social one, it meant that although her grandmother's time to die was near, it was not yet at hand. She also said that the idea of the grandmother being asked to tea had been taken from The Hobbit. This willingness to borrow ideas from books and recreate poems from dreams showed that Tania was aware of how to get ideas for writing from a variety of sources.

However, the most interesting aspect of our discussion about "The Tragedy" was the vivid way Tania recalled being able to use the events from the dream to write the poem. For example, she spoke of the shark's jaw she remembered seeing in her dream; Tania had this souvenir on a shelf in her room. Yet, she remembered waking up and thinking, "I knew I had seen it (the shark's jaw) somewhere and wasn't sure where. And then I remember I had this flash that -- oh, my gosh, it's her jaw (grandmother's) that I have on my shelf!" As well as being able to recall specific images, Tania could remember sounds and feelings. For instance, the phrases "air emptied of sounds", "cackled away", and "the low rumble" were words that she said came directly into her mind as she thought of what she had heard, seen and felt in the dream. Tania chose these phrases as her favourite lines in the poem because she was also interested in how she remembered details from the dream to use in her poem.

Through our discussion of "The Tragedy" Tania revealed a strong sense of how to craft a poem. Tania was able to rely on her memory to assist her so she could recreate her dream in poem form; she also demonstrated a vivid imagination. She decided to use personification so that Death would visit her grandmother in an interesting way by asking her to tea, something she had not dreamt but added. Finally, Tania selected only those details from her dream which would be the most effective in the poem.

"The Speckled Cow" was the second poem Tania showed me, and one that was entirely opposite in content from the previous poem. The mood of "The Speckled Cow' was humourous. Rather than selecting a particular part, Tania said she liked the whole poem because the tone was mischievous and her language arts teacher didn't like it; "it didn't have any figures of speech" or anything she thought he valued. Another reason she liked "The Speckled Cow" was because it was meaningful, or "straight and warm." Tania said the poem meant:

> Don't stay plain; be individual; be yourself. Don't just sink in -- diffuse into water. Be like ink. Make sure you stand up for what's your own and what feels right to you. Don't follow other people around and be a follower. You don't have to be a leader, but be your own person. (interview two)

We had fun reading the poem and Tania's disposition reminded me that even though she sounded in every respect from her knowledgeable comments about writing like an older writer, she was still an adolescent who sometimes wrote about young themes.

When asked if she would change anything about the poetry, Tania replied that the booklet was polished and complete. She was finished working on her poems and wouldn't be making any further changes.

Rebecca was another student I interviewed who preferred to write poetry. She had also won two poetry contests in her school. Rebecca brought a large folder of poetry with her to the second interview. She had trouble choosing one poem she liked, because they were all her favourites.

"Deep in the Meadow Green" was a poem chosen by the school as the winning entry in a contest which allowed Rebecca to work with a visiting author. She was excited that she had won. In the poem, Rebecca experimented with different points of view. She wanted to communicate the message that hunting was a recreational pursuit to the hunter but a much deadlier game to the deer. Rebecca read *"A different game / From the one we played; / He played his game with guns ; / With death as his playmate, / And partner true, / Deep in the meadow grass,"* as her favourite lines. She felt they effectively portrayed the hunter for who he was, a man she said was "mindless in the way he shot the deer for fun."

Deep in the Meadow Green

In the meadow
Where I was,
On that hot, hot day;
But I was cold -
Why was I cold?
Maybe I knew,
Death was on its way.

Running, leaping, soaring

Over the green meadow grass,
Neither of us saw it,
Playing too,
In the deep, green, concealing grass.
A different game
From the one we played;
He played his game with guns;
With death as his playmate,
And partner true,
Deep in the meadow grass.

A shot,
A scream,
And then a shout, a joyous cry,
He won his game
And for his fun,
My brother had to die.
Over the hills,
Down the road,
Deep in the forest green;
There is a deer
So sadly felled,
Deep in the grass,
The green, green grass,
Deep in the meadow green.

by Rebecca

Rebecca wanted to communicate the idea to the reader that "game" had more than one meaning. She wrote in clues to make the idea clearer by using repetition with "deep in the meadow green" to show that the nature of the grass was actually changing.from "green meadow grass they're leaping over," to grass which is "concealing grass that is hiding the hunter" to the final lines "*deep in the grass, The green green grass, Deep in the meadow green,*" which Rebecca likened to "a shroud". She was disappointed that many of her classmates didn't understand the different levels of meaning in the poem. Therefore, she would change this poem to try and make the ending clearer.

Through our discussion about "Deep in the Meadow Green", Rebecca showed me that she was working at a sophisticated level with poetry because she consciously chose to manipulate certain words, and devices like repetition to achieve a desired effect, which in this case was to communicate a complex point of view about hunting. As with Dena, Rebecca relied on the use of metaphor. She was different than Dena, however, because she also concentrated on repetition of certain words like "deep" and "green", and phrases like "deep in the meadow green," in slightly different contexts to write on more than one level, a particular technique Tania had not mentioned at the interview. Rebecca also possessed a keen sense of audience; she was concerned that her peers had not understood the poem.

Another poem we critically discussed was "Ravine Magic," a poem that began as a school writing assignment. Students were asked to write something about Edmonton. This poem was chosen by a visiting professor as the poem from the class to read aloud. It was an honour for this student to have her work published this way. "I almost died," said Rebecca, "but it was a neat feeling being chosen."

In the poem, Rebecca featured the ravine as "a small part of the old country and the beginning of Canada.". The ideas in this poem were interesting because they were broader in scope than someone her age might normally have written. For example, as subject matter she presented the ravine from a historical perspective that had its roots in "the old country", instead of merely writing a poem about the ravine as a place for recreation.

When asked what part she liked, Rebecca said the way she had made the ravine sound magical without actually labelling it "magical" was a strong feature of the poem. This comment demonstrated that Rebecca had learned that it was more effective to show an idea than to tell it to the reader, an important feature of successful writing.

As with Dena and Tania, Rebecca had written a poem which dealt with the topic of death. In "Thoughts", a poem written after her girlfriend's friend commited suicide, Rebecca attempted to convey feelings that the suicidal girl might have felt. She purposefully made the poem sound contradictory because it was consistent with the way a person commiting suicide might be. She explained,

> At the end the poem totally changes. It really hits you. The poem is confusing and yet very simple.... A problem that makes somebody want to die can be very, very confusing to them, but if you talked to somebody else, it can sound simple. Just like this poem. It looks very confusing. [For example], how can something be "square with roundness", or "short with decades"? But when you think about the words and combine the ideas, you can tell how it [suicide] could actually happen. (interview two)

In "Thoughts" Rebecca used the form and a juxtaposition of words not usually seen together to represent the person. In this way, the poem itself became a metaphor for the mixed-up thoughts of a girl about to commit suicide. Once again, she worked consciously to manipulate language and form to achieve a purpose.

In general, Rebecca's comments about what she would change in her poetry were few. Her main concern seemed to be whether or not her ideas made sense. She also felt that the words she used had to have a natural flow. With one of her poems in two of the three stanzas, Rebecca thought that the words seemed to come directly to her, whereas in the third stanza she "had to think consciously about every word." She would change this final stanza because it lacked the smooth flow of the other two. On the whole, however, Rebecca would make very few changes. This may have been because she was extremely discriminating in her taste about her own work since she "immediately ripped up a poem" (interview two) that didn't have good rhythm when she read it over.

Geoffrey chose nature as his preferred choice of writing subject matter. In this, he showed a similar writing preference to Rebecca, who had written about a deer and the ravine. Like Rebecca, he too, was keen to talk about his writing. In fact, the interview took place after school; we had already talked for nearly two hours, and Geoffrey could have talked much longer. He told me that the interviews were his first opportunity to talk about his writing.

"The Lake of Crystal" was a poem Geoffrey had written about a development firm that was building properties in the lake area where his family had their cottage. In the poem he was concerned with representing as accurately as possible the sounds, sights and feelings he remembered about the wildlife at the lake.

The Lake of Crystal

Remember:
The peaceful lake,
Cut only by a loon family wake.
Birds flitted by,
In the early dawn sky.

Remember:
The woodpeckers pecked,
The bluejays cawed.

The fish were all leaping,
The magpies jawed.

Remember:
The squirrel scolded loudly,
The bluejays screamed.
And now suddenly everything seemed
To be falling apart.

Remember:
Now everything
Is revolutionary and new.
Zippy new boats
Obscure the once magnificient view.

Remember:
At the death of the lake
And population wake,
We undertook a move.
Now in a crystal clear lake,
Cut by a loon family wake,
Fifty miles from a town,
In every direction around.

by Geoffrey

Geoffrey chose the phrases *"The peaceful lake cut only by a loon family wake -- Birds flitted by in the early dawn sky,"* as words he liked because he thought this description made the lake sound "isolated and the ideal place to be." Other phrases such as, *"The woodpeckers pecked, the bluejays cawed; the fish were all leaping -- the magpies jawed,"* were chosen because the words sounded "real." Geoffrey explained, "At first I had the bluejays 'jawing' and the magpies 'cawing', but I changed it because magpies don't 'caw'" (interview two).

Geoffrey was worried that with encroaching development at the lake the environment would suffer. Therefore, through this poem he had written about some of his deepest sentiments. He had been thinking about the ideas for a long time before he wrote the poem. When he finally wrote it, most of the words and phrases came easily to him. Geoffrey remembered making a few minor changes at the time he wrote it. Although he had thought about the subject for a long time, it had taken only an hour to write and Geoffrey felt it was finished.

Before we could read "Where There's A Voice," a short story he had written about husky dogs, Geoffrey blurted out, "I already know my favourite part!" We read a paragraph that described husky puppies as "*silver and black with little pink toes and creamy sapphire eyes.*" Geoffrey explained how these details realistically described the picture he had in his mind of the way the pups were. He asked,

> Have you ever seen a little husky pup? They've got silver and black fur and they look very streamlined. When they're awake, they walk around and their little pink toes are flashing and they really do have "creamy sapphire eyes." I have the picture of the pup right here in my head. (interview two)

Once again Geoffrey chose a section of his writing because he felt the details clearly described nature in a way that was true to life. For the same reason, Geoffrey would change the beginning of the story because he felt it needed more details to describe the older husky dog. His comments also revealed that Geoffrey had the ability to visualize an experience from memory with such clarity that he could actually describe in words the picture he saw in his mind.

Dal was like Geoffrey, because she also spoke of seeing what she wrote. She came to the interview with several stories to share, but was particularly interested in discussing the story she was currently working on, about a boy who drowned. When asked what she liked about this story, Dal said that she usually wrote about events she had experienced. Therefore, since she hadn't experienced a drowning, "the topic was different for her, and therefore difficult to write properly." Yet, she was happy that she had tried something new.

Dal talked primarily of the process she used to write a story which meant being able to visualize the story events. In Dal's case, she not only visualized a character or scene, but actually watched the action move forward. Dal's explanation of the way she wrote was interesting. She talked about "seeing" the mother in the story bent over her son after he had died, and explained the feeling she had of experiencing the story as she wrote it,

> I get really, really perturbed in my mind. . . . When I write I have the whole story. I see everything. I see her on the tile. I see her on the boat. I see everything. . . . i just see it. And I just write it. I really, . . . see it as it's happening. It's like a movie in my head. . . .Even something like this that has never happened to me before. It's really abstract and strange but I can truly have the whole thing in my mind as it's happening. (interview two)

Dal's parents had told her that her stories were enjoyable because she could "paint a clear picture for them with her writing." From Dal's description of the process she used to write this story, she could paint a clear picture with words because she could vividly see the story unfold, as "a movie in my head."

Another example of Dal's writing was a story that had been published in Magpie magazine, (a publication of student writing edited by Glen Huser of Edmonton Public Schools). The story originated from a family holiday to Los Angeles. Dal's favourite lines were *"The sun begins to hide behind the clouds. Everything begins to calm down and soon it's just me, my park bench and my newspaper roof."* She liked these lines because they realistically depicted the rough part of town where the family had stayed. Dal also felt good about the story because her classmates had thought it "worked". Dal would change parts of her stories that "didn't fit", or "sounded choppy". (interview two)

Another student keen to discuss a story in progress was Eva. Eva arrived with a journal of writing entries for her ACP class (Academic Challenge Program), the journal I had given her, a play and the story she was currently writing. She was forthright about not having brought her recent poetry to show me explaining,

> Sometimes it's hard to write down some things . . . because you don't know if you want to hand it [the writing] in, because it might be personal to you. Or you write about an experience that you don't want anyone else to know. (interview two)

Within less than a minute of our second interview, she told me she had written a play called "Five Dark Tunnels". Although she was obviously proud of having written the play, we did not have the opportunity to discuss it in any depth. Instead, we immediately jumped into a discussion of the short story. We spent so much time on the story that the interview time ran out and I found myself asking, "but what about the play?"

We discussed the short story in great detail. When Eva was asked to choose a part she liked, she settled on a character called Andre as her favourite part of the story. "He ties the whole story together," she explained. "I had to make the ship burn down somehow. I had to make him stranded on the island. He's in the water with only a barrel" (interview two). Then Eva pointed to the following section from the story, which had originally been written in poem form, as her favourite part because it was "well worded." In the passage which follows, the character Andre who is talking, has been lost at sea.

> *The first thing I felt was the cold water and how it hit my face . . . a few startling droplets. I tried to duck my head under the barrel and breathe in my pacifier, but I could hardly move in the ice bath. The blatant thickness of the waves dove suddenly into my limbs and joints. Twice death grabbed my hands but the water's icy revenge took hold of my consciousness. I had to roll back many times but I could not accept the water. (interview two)*

When Eva finished reading the section aloud she expressed displeasure at what she had written, explaining that although she thought it had sounded "good" when she wrote it, it now sounded "typical." Since her goal seemed to be to sound as original as possible, this was major criticism. However, after we looked at particular words and phrases she felt better about the passage and decided that she had used some powerful adjectives, although her writing could stand improvement. She chose *"blatant thickness of the waves,"* and *"death grabbed his hands"* , as examples of effective phrases. Eva also explained that the story wasn't finished because "you read it and revise, read it and revise. I hate a lot of what I write" (interview two).

An interesting aspect of Eva's explanation of the development of her central character was that as she talked about creating Andre, she slipped in pronoun usage from using "he" to "I", as she talked. For example, when Eva told me how she would change Andre's personality so that he sounded at times like he might give in instead of fighting for survival, she used the passage mentioned above and said, "Like over here I'd cut this out," speaking as an author. But then Eva explained, "He wanted to live. Then I didn't. Then I wanted to die," speaking as the character Andre. In some ways, Eva's comments about experiencing the story were similar to Dal's since Eva sounded so involved with the story. The difference was, of course, that Dal mentioned watching the story as an observor might watch a film, whereas Eva spoke as a participant from inside the story.

As we finished discussing the story together, Eva talked about where she found various ideas to write about, and why she had made certain choices with the characters' words and actions. It was clear from her comments that she had the remainder of the story plot mapped out in her mind. She was excited about what she was writing which was why time ran out and she returned to class without having shared "Five Dark Tunnels".

Delvina was also keen to talk about her writing in progress, which consisted of most of the writing she brought with her. For example, she had bits and pieces of beginnings to stories and poems in the journal I had given her, along with pages of looseleaf with more of the same beginnings to stories expanded in various ways. Some ideas were partially written poems. "Shoes" and "Panda Motion" were two fairly short but complete poems. Delvina wanted to discuss each writing idea.

First we looked at story ideas. "Victory" was the beginning to a piece about a girl trying to ride her bike up a steep hill. Another story idea was about a town where all the roles were reversed so that children were the heads of families. Next, we read through partially completed poems. "Freedom Land" was about Nigerians immigrating to Canada. "That's What Friends Are For" was Delvina's version of a popular song where she had taken the original and adapted the lyrics to suit her own ideas. Another partially completed poem was about a coral reef. In the poem, she compared life to the life span of a reef. She was happy with the poem and had future plans to complete it when she had more ideas. On the whole, Delvina had beginning ideas, but she needed to learn how to expand them into stories or poems.

The two completed poems were "Panda Motion" which was a humorous poem about the panda on loan to the Calgary zoo from China, and "Shoes", a poem about her sneakers. "Panda Motion" had the line, "All you see is black and white; Yet they're as lovable as can be," which Delvina liked because she said it captured the way she remembered the pandas from her visit to see them. "Shoes", also had a line she liked, "sneaker, sandals with holes chewed through," which was her favourite because it reminded her of the way she dressed wearing anything, whether the clothing "had holes or not". Both poems were about ordinary topics and, yet, were enjoyable to read. From these examples, and the ideas she had shown me, Delvina appeared to be more a developing writer than an able writer.

In general, Delvina was more at ease discussing her ideas than her actual poetry. When it came to the poems, she had trouble articulating what lines or parts she liked and why she liked them. It was as if she didn't have the language to articulate what she thought. There would be uncomfortable pauses while she struggled to express herself. Yet, when discussing ideas, she was eager to share what she thought. Delvina explained that she had never had the opportunity to discuss writing in this way before. She needed to develop the language to talk about her writing. It also appeared that she lacked a solid understanding of the qualities that made writing effective. In terms of her own writing process, she was a student who needed assistance to know where to find writing ideas, and how to develop ideas further once she had a place to begin writing. Delvina had an abundance of enthusiasm for writing as was evidenced by her many attempts; she needed someone to help channel this energy into areas where she could find success.

Rowan demonstrated the same inability to articulate what he knew about writing that Delvina had. When I asked him to choose something he had written to share with me, he was almost painful to watch. He was extremely hesitant. Rowan had brought a journal with stories to the interview, so after much persistence on my part, he found a section to share. He was nervous about reading it aloud, so I read it silently. At the time, Rowan told me that he hated to be present when people read his work. When I asked him why, he explained that his stories always sounded much better in his head than when he heard them read aloud.

The section I read was full of gruesome details describing a scene in an action-packed story. For example, the antagonist had the veins in his hand pop and his head explode. Having been a junior high teacher for some years, I was not surprised, since I had seen so many other students write in a similar way often trying to outdo each other to see who could sound the most grotesque. As I read Rowan's piece I wondered again why this age group found violent subject matter so appealing. There might be several reasons such as the shock value and social acceptance of being "cool" by writing this way. Another possibility was because of the abundance of television programs and movies with violent subject matter. Also it seemed possible that some teenagers who particularly enjoyed writing gory material might feel that they could hide behind the subject matter and therefore be less vulnerable when it came to revealing their ideas and feelings, at such an uncomfortable, peer-conscious age. However, although the details were gruesome and unbelievable, Rowan had worked hard at the description which showed a limitless imagination, and the story was fast paced and interesting. Rowan chose this particular part because although it was not his best writing, he liked the idea. He also said he was getting bored trying to find something to satisfy me. I could tell from his writing that Rowan was different from other youngsters I had read who wrote merely to shock, because his writing showed considerable effort and ability.

In addition, I felt that Rowan's attitude between our first and second interviews had changed. Unable to pinpoint the reason, I wondered if he was much more hesitant at the second interview because we were discussing actual pieces of his writing. He seemed to be very self-conscious and nervous about sharing his work. Yet, I had heard from one of his classmates whom I had also interviewed, that their class could hardly wait to hear Rowan's stories, and that even though his stories were so well received, he was also nervous about sharing his writing in class.

When I asked Rowan what changes he would make, he shrugged his shoulders and said that since everyone seemed to like what he wrote, his stories were probably "o.k." (interview two).

Another student who was also hesitant to show me something he'd written was Jonathon. I had phoned Jonathon the night before to remind him to bring a piece of writing, so when he showed up at the interview without any and told me he'd forgotten his writing at home, it sounded like avoidance. We found a story in his locker which had been written in language arts. The class had been asked to write an alternate ending to the Ray Bradbury story called "The Foghorn".

Jonathon seemed apologetic that he didn't have more writing to show me. When I asked him if he'd written much this year, he said that his teacher had been absent from school and that is why he hadn't more writing to share. I knew from the previous year's interview with Jonathon that he had shared a close relationship with his language arts teacher. She had recommended him for this study and her obvious deep commitment to teaching and concern for Jonathon may have been reasons why he had written more last year. This was an indication of the significant impact on students that teachers can have. It was also evidence that Jonathon's motivation for writing was external.

Like Rowan, Jonathon took forever to find a section in the story he liked. He told me that it was difficult for him to find something well written because he usually hated everything he wrote and threw it away. Finally he chose these lines,

> *The wind whistled through the cracks in the lighthouse walls and below us the ocean roared like a hungry lion. The waves crashed upon the rocks and threw spray into the path of the light illuminating the spray like fireworks in a darkened sky. (interview two)*

Jonathon liked the way he had written the description, particularly the use of the similes *"roared like a hungry lion"*, and *"like fireworks in a darkened sky."* His reluctance to admit that his writing was well written appeared to mean that he had a lack of confidence about his ability to write. This was different from Rowan, for although Rowan was nervous about hearing his work read aloud, and was uncooperative about finding a section he liked, he had told me at the interview that his peers thought highly of his work. Jonathon told me that there wasn't anything in his story that he would change.

At the beginning of our second interview, Darusha acted casual and uninterested in the two pieces of writing she had brought to share. Her attitude was almost disrespectful to me at first. I felt that Darusha was like both Rowan and Jonathon, in that she was reluctant to show me what she had written.

During our first interview Darusha had commented several times on how careful she was about trusting people with her poetry. She had also told me that she wrote primarily poetry. Yet, she arrived with two short stories and no poetry.

Darusha immediately insisted that she would not read either story aloud. She also said that I was not to read them orally either. Since I had not requested this, it surprised me. The first piece we looked at was called "Beings". It was a short account of a church youth group rally in Saskatchewan that Darusha attended. She liked the line *"piled into cars"* because they had felt "lumpish" after the retreat and this line accurately represented this feeling. Furthermore, Darusha said the general tone of the piece was "exactly the way we felt, as if we were in the same space and time . . . in a metaphysical way". Listening to Darusha talk about this piece and some personal feelings she had about the teen experience made me feel as if I was being tested. If as an interviewer I passed the test and responded the right way, she would reward me with honesty about her writing.

Darusha said this was her original copy. She had a revised version that she had changed only because her teacher requested that the class revise. "So I changed things that weren't that important. Because I didn't want to change anything, really," she explained. Darusha chose the beginning of the story "Happy Mutants" as a favourite part because she thought it was so different from the usual, "Once upon a time" fairy tale beginning:

> *Once upon a day in a land closer than you wish, lived a disturbed band of researchers. They worked, lived and ate, in a deep dark cave called a genetics lab. (interview two)*

She also liked what she had written because it "conjured up [the idea] of mad scientists without calling them 'mad scientists.'" As mentioned earlier by Rebecca, Darusha also thought that writing should convey meaning by showing and not telling the reader the intended impression, in this case the "mad scientists."

Evidence that Darusha had a strong awareness of her audience came from her remarks about including the sentence, *"They lived and ate,"* in the story. She explained that since "teenagers only think about sex and food and you can't stick in sex, you better include food, so I included *'ate'* to keep the audience interested." She was proud of the story and planned to write a series of sequels which might become cartoons. When asked about changes, Darusha said she preferred not to change first drafts because "they're fresh and raw" and then "lose their spontaneity" (interview two) if altered.

Darusha's extensive vocabulary, and apparent understanding of writing had led me to believe that she was a talented writer. The two pieces she shared were not of the calibre I had anticipated from our first interview. I was disappointed because I felt she had not shown me some of her best writing. Throughout the second interview her demeanor towards me changed. Maybe I passed the test of being trustworthy, or she felt relieved about not having to share anything she didn't want to with me. In any case, by the time our second interview was over, I sensed that we had both enjoyed the opportunity to talk with another writer about writing. Darusha left in a much more positive mood than when she had arrived.

Chereen was not only reluctant to share her writing with me, but she also failed to show up for the second interview. She was the only student who missed the interview and had to be phoned at home. When Chereen arrived, she acted shy and insecure about talking about her writing. She had not brought any writing to show me at all, and said she had some writing in her journal but that she'd left it at home. I had phoned and asked her to bring some writing with her only half an hour before. I wondered if Chereen had been reluctant to share her writing with me because she didn't know me well enough, or if she actually had writing to share, or if she felt her writing wasn't of a high enough calibre to share. Interestingly enough, Chereen volunteered that she and Rebecca both wrote poetry which they shared with each other; so like Darusha, it may have been that Chereen and I had not established the trust necessary for her to feel comfortable sharing. She explained that at her previous school there had been a teacher who really encouraged her to write, and since that time she hadn't written. This was the same reason that Jonathon had given for not writing.

Pauline and Virginia were two students chosen for this research project because as Academic Challenge students their school had nominated them to attend the "3-2-1 Write Conference." Both girls had reasons why writing was not their favourite pastime that were different than Chereen had given. Pauline explained that she had not written much outside of school recently, because she was too busy to write, whereas, Virginia didn't write unless she was in the right mood. Although both girls were not enthusiastic writers they were willing to talk about their experiences with writing at school.

Pauline shared a writing technique from her language arts class that had helped her get started writing. The teacher had them write beginnings to stories on a regular basis. When they had written five beginnings, they had to choose one to complete.

Pauline brought two poems and a short story all from school writing assignments to share. We looked at the two poems first which were followup assignments to a short story the class had read called "Trust". They read the story and then wrote on the same theme. One poem was about the way the links in a chain support each other to form a whole. The second poem was about a rabbit and how dependent pets are on their owners. Pauline's poems were easily read and understood.

Next we looked at the short story Pauline had written, a satire about two dresses in a closet which were about to go into the washing machine. The story was told from the point of view of the dresses who were talking. There were several humorous sections that would appeal to teenagers. Pauline liked this story more than her poetry because it was funny. She was also pleased with the subject because she felt the unexpected perspective made the story comical and she wasn't used to writing humorous stories. Although Pauline was more positive about her story than her poetry, there appeared to be a general lack of enthusiasm towards the pieces. When I asked if she would make any changes, Pauline said that the story was finished. She added that she had reworked the beginning several times.

It was evident that Pauline was imaginative, bright and resourceful, yet, I felt that the writing she had shared lacked purposefulness and direction. Her attitude suggested she had written only because it was required. Pauline was a busy girl with an active extra-curricular sports life. Although she had time to be involved in many pursuits, writing wasn't one she had chosen. It occurred to me that writing had not been a meaningful activity for Pauline; she certainly did not appear to feel motivated or challenged in any way to write unless it was required at school.

Virginia's feelings towards writing were similar to Pauline's, although Virginia told me immediately that the reason she hadn't written was because she "didn't feel like it." She explained that she had the chance over the summer to write, but she "had to be in the right mood", and she hadn't been. Although it was common for her to think up good stories all the time, it "took too much energy to write them down."

Virginia told me that since the beginning of the year she had written six "stories" in language arts for a humour unit. This worked out to be six short stories in three months. Her three favourites were a tall tale about a fishing trip, a news report about a fellow who drove his grandmother's car around a parking lot in reverse, and a fairy tale rewritten to reflect modern times. She said she had enjoyed writing the humorous stories, especially the fairy tale, because the teacher had given them a beginning so they could get started writing, instead of having to think up a funny idea.

Virginia had brought a story written in grade three to the second interview. I asked her why she hadn't brought something more recent especially since she had written so many stories in language arts. Virginia assured me that she wasn't nervous about sharing her writing with me; there weren't any other pieces at home and her writing at school had been handed in to be marked.

When asked what part she liked, Virginia explained that the whole story was special to her, because she had written it for a correspondence teacher one year when the family had travelled extensively throughout New Zealand. She liked the topic because she felt it was original. No other student would have written about a kiwi bird. Virginia was also pleased because she had included factual information, in particular "that kiwis are nocturnal and blind." Virginia told me that a story should always be based on research as this one was. She explained:

> It just turned out that I was there. I learned about it. . . . Like a writer will plan to write a story, write an outline, and go out and research it. For example, Martyn Godfrey knew a friend who visited West Edmonton Mall every day for three months to study the place. (interview two)

Virginia felt her writing style had changed since grade three, although she had trouble explaining how it was different. When asked what she would change Virginia said, "add more vocabulary."

Virginia's mom kept memorable samples of her school work and this story had served as a record of their trip to New Zealand. Virginia enjoyed rereading the story she had written as a little girl. It brought back pleasurable memories. As with Pauline, Virginia did not exhibit a keen commitment to writing. She had fun daydreaming but saw no reason to record her stories in written form.

Virginia had told me that she had to be in the "right mood" to write. Caroline also associated her moods with writing, but she used the moods she was in as fodder for writing. She took the way she felt and developed that feeling into a character's personality. "Its like having different people with me, . . . and I like making lots of characters" (interview two). However, Caroline's true passion was drawing. Her drawing and writing were connected because before she wrote, she drew a picture. She explained that she drew how she felt in order to "get into" the story. Here was yet another level of a student writer experiencing what she wrote.

We looked at two examples of her writing; both were stories. The first story we looked at was an old fashioned fairy tale that didn't seem to be particularly original in any way. The idea behind the story was that a poor peasant girl could be happier than a wealthy princess, because she possessed a generous spirit. The second story, however, was more interesting because of some of the details that Caroline had used to describe a future world where the sun had suddenly lost its heat. For instance, she had written the line *"In the distance blurred by rising heat, two small figures rise from the sun warmed waters"* which grabbed my attention. Caroline chose this line as her favourite because the details allowed you to see "the wavy heat lines blurring people coming up from the water." She also liked the fact that this story was science fiction; she had been able to change life as we know it, so that the earth was hot one minute and cold the next. This scenario offerred fascinating possibilities.

Caroline planned to abandon the story except for the line mentioned above. She chose a small kernel from the original story, a new idea embedded in what she had previously written, to develop further. She explained,

> I like it cause it's just a little thing not too many people would write about, like a beach, the time and the heat. I like doing short things like that now, . . . how a cat feels in an alley, or how you would feel if you were a certain fruit in a refrigerator. (interview two)

Caroline worked with a single idea, or a solitary character and through art and the imagination, played with it until she had what she wanted to achieve. Caroline's individuality and magnetic personality made her a fascinating interview subject.

Then I interviewed Susan and found her vulnerability and sincerity heart warming. She arrived at the second interview with a play she had recently written for language arts and a story she had re-written in order to have more than one piece of writing to show me. Susan told me that her mother was a writer but that she didn't put any pressure on Susan to write. This was because Susan's grandmother, also a writer, had pushed her mother to be a writer, and her mother had rebelled as a child but then taken up writing as an adult.

Her vulnerability was immediately apparent when she spoke about the play. Susan had felt good about writing a play for the first time, but comments her teacher made showed her that it was poorly written. He had commented that her stage directions were unclear, the passages of dialogue were too brief, and the play jumped too quickly from character to character.

The plot of the play, which was called "Unbelievable," was the story of a teenage babysitter faced with incredibly mischievious youngsters as her charges. Susan chose two scenes as her favourites because they represented real life. One scene featured a fight at the dinner table and the second scene had the three year old stick ice cream into the VCR to see if it would show up on television. We discussed the play in terms of how it would be performed and Susan's comments revealed that she had given much thought to this aspect. Once again, visualizing was mentioned as part of the writing process: Susan said she wrote the play picturing a "chain of events in her mind." As we finished discussing "Unbelievable," Susan told me that maybe the play was "quite good after all" and she would continue to work on it.

Susan apologized profusely about the original version of the second piece of writing, which she showed me along with the recent rewrite. For example, she said she had written the story in grade six and it was immature. The words she had originally written like "dreamboat" now sounded unrealistic. Spelling mistakes were everywhere. In contrast, she was proud of the revisions she had made in the new version. Although Susan thought that rewriting the original would be just an exercise, as she rewrote it, memories of the way she had originally felt flooded back into her consciousness. This was a positive experience for her.

Comments made about the differences between the two versions showed that Susan was perceptive about writing. For example, she said that there were more details throughout the rewrite, but that the beginning was more concise. Furthermore, she added that the ending was written more as a "closing statement." Finally, the new story was better because it was as "realistic as it could be." (interview two)

Spelling was clearly a major issue to Susan. She spoke of deliberately choosing words she knew how to spell in the grade 9 version of the story. For example, she chose "boyfriend" in the rewrite and "fiance" in the original which she said was incorrectly spelled. Susan confided that when she was younger she quit writing because she was told so often that her spelling was weak. At the time, she was placed in a Special Education class for remedial spelling help. This made Susan feel that she was hopeless at writing, so she quit. Susan still experienced difficulty with spelling. A current problem she suffered occurred when she was asked to read her work aloud in class. Susan explained how she was often humiliated but afraid to speak out. She struggled with words in her story that she had misspelled yet understood when first written, but didn't make sense when later read aloud. This made her forget the original intent of the sentence. Rather than admit the problem, Susan pretended that the incorrect pronunciation was the way she had intentionally meant the story to sound. As a teacher I found this testimony touching. Here was a bright child with a lot to offer who was emotionally handicapped since she saw herself as a failure because she couldn't spell.

A Conclusion to the Chapter

In Chapter Five, " Able Teenage Writers Share Their Writing," I have reported what students said about chosen pieces of their writing. A summary of the discussion that occurred was given for each student interviewed. The detailed responses showed that in the majority of cases students were excited to share their knowledge of writing with an adult. In several instances, only previously shared or "safe" pieces were offered at the interview, although references were made to current pieces of writing, which indicated the importance of establishing an atmosphere of trust. On the whole, the experience of discussing a piece of writing with a student author revealed characteristics about the student's ability as a writer and additional insights into the student's individuality as a writer.

Many common themes appeared in "Find Something That You Like And Tell Me Why You Like It." Perhaps the most significant issue was the impact that teachers had on student writers. For example, Rebecca had teachers who encouraged her to write poetry and enter school contests, and she had won on two occasions. Dal mentioned the special relationship she had with her academic challenge teacher with whom she looked forward to showing her writing. On the other hand, Susan's self-esteem was closely tied to the negative reactions of teachers to her spelling difficulties and a play she had written. However, an interested teacher had helped her believe in herself and write again. In another case, Jonathon pointed out his lack of motivation towards writing because he no longer felt the inspiration of a caring language arts teacher because he had moved ahead a grade. This reminded me of a personal experience with a young nephew who had said that he no longer wrote because his teacher had moved away. In a different example, Tania prefaced her comments about the poem she chose to share with the information that her teacher had not particularly liked it and yet it was still a favourite; although from the fact that she revealed this information, his influence was clearly felt.

"How we receive children's writing affects their willingness to write. The development of poetic thought needs nurturing," said Wanda Rogers (1985). She also suggested that one way to receive children's writing was to "seek the interesting, unusual, the single profound thought that might lie within an otherwise ordinary piece of writing and encourage children to stretch from there" (p. 297).

Susan's positive attitude towards her play after our interview was an example of how stressing the positive, instead of the negative, made a tremendous difference in a student's self-esteem.

Several students mentioned the ability to visualize what they wrote. For example, Tania talked of using direct images from her dreams in poetry. Geoffrey used his memory to recall specific details of a husky pup. Dal saw a whole story unfold. Eva visualized her character Andre to the extent that she spoke as him when she described the plot. Finally, Caroline created a story from a concrete picture she had drawn. These students used memory extensively to form a visual picture in their minds or, in Caroline's case an actual picture on paper, as part of their writing process.

Some students shared common writing topics. Geoffrey and Rebecca wrote about nature. Dena, Tania, and Dal were some of the students who explored the theme of death. Darusha and Caroline enjoyed writing fairy tales. Virginia, Delvina, and Pauline felt that writing comedy was fun. Writing preferences depended on the student's experience level with writing about different topics and individual choices they made.

A preferred form for Dena, Tania, and Rebecca was poetry. Other students wrote stories and poetry. For those students who wrote poetry, if the topic was too personal they refused to share their work. In general, there was the feeling that sharing poetry made the author more vulnerable; because as Darusha had explained, it revealed too much information about the person.

An awareness of audience was commonly felt by some of the students. Perhaps the most humorous example of this was given by Darusha who explained that she had included what the scientists ate in her story (since she wasn't allowed to write about sex, and "food and sex were all that interested teenagers"). In another example, Rebecca was concerned that the audience did not understand the layered meaning in her poem about the deer.

Common qualities of writing appreciated by some of the students were whether or not a piece had realism, if the writing showed an intended message without telling it, the importance of specific details, and the use of metaphor. Examples included Dal's positive feelings about her Los Angeles story because it conveyed a realistic depiction of the rough neighbourhood, Darusha's pleasure at her depiction of mad scientists without using the word "mad," Susan's awareness that her revised story was superior because it included more specific details to fill in the gaps, and Dena's experimentation with metaphor in her poem about highway driving.

A few students had in common their assertion that they did not have time for writing. For example, Pauline and Virginia, two Academic Challenge students, explained that they were too busy, or not in the mood to write. It appeared that some of the students had been chosen for this study because of a high academic standing and not necessarily an interest or aptitude for writing. There was not necessarily a correlation between the two; however, it appeared that some teachers might think that an academically inclined student was also a writer.

Two students in particular shared their good feelings about being recognized by their schools for their writing ability. Dena had won school contests and Dal was thrilled to be published in Magpie Magazine.

An interesting area worthy of further study was the issue of some students having difficulty articulating their knowledge about writing. Delvina wanted desperately to talk about writing, yet she didn't appear to have a language to communicate her ideas. In a similar way, Rowan who was an excellent story teller, became tongue tied when asked to find and explain an effective part of his story.

Another area shared by many of these writers was the difference between the conceptualization of a story and how the final product sounded. They were disappointed that exciting possibilities ended up sounding "typical". The fear of sounding mundane may be why Rowan and Darusha find it so painful to hear their writing read aloud. Many of these students were highly critical of the way their writing sounded.

Some differences revealed through the second interviews were in ability. For example, Delvina had bits and pieces that were beginnings to stories, but needed assistance channeling and developing her energy and enthusiasm. Tania was clearly a sophisticated writer with incredible ability.

Other individual differences were in technique. Caroline chose one idea from a story to develop differently in another piece of writing. She also was the only student who mentioned using her moods to create characters. Dena wrote several poems to help her sort through ideas, including a poem on highway driving which was one of her fears. Eva spoke of writing a section in her story as a poem first. Rebecca experimented with form extensively using the shape of a poem to represent ideas. She also wanted to work further in this area learning how to make the most of line breaks in poetry. Tania talked at length about using personification to depict in poem form the horror of death appearing in a strange dream about her grandmother. These were all differences in technique among those interviewed.

One final difference was found in Susan, the only student interviewed who talked openly of spelling problems affecting her willingness to write. Yet, so many of our students, like Susan face the stigma of having learning difficulties and having to cope with teachers who have the same high expectations for all, on a daily basis.

Chapter Five demonstrated the considerable knowledge about writing that able writers possess. It also provided a composite picture of how individual and unique student writers are.

Chapter Six

Writing in the Classroom

An Introduction to the Chapter

Chapter Six deals with the classroom writing environment. The following areas were dealt with in the interviews and are reported here: what students said good writing was, sharing their writing with their peers, sharing writing with adults, and keeping classroom journals, writing at home versus writing at school, writing in the classroom, and advice on teaching writing.

What Makes Good Writing?

> *Something is good if it has real symbolism behind it, . . . sort of like a light. When you read it, you just feel something. (Tania, interview two)*

Since Tania experimented with symbolism in her own writing, it was not surprising that she knew that writing that made one think was quality writing. She also said that good writing could arouse feelings in the reader. Other comments the students made also indicated that they had convictions about what good writing was, whether or not they felt they were successful writers. For example, Jonathon said that good writers had "good ideas, good topics and the voice of [the person] who's writing" (interview two) which showed that he understood some of the characteristics of good writing, even though he had told me that he did not consider himself to be a writer. Since several of the students told me they had not been asked to think about whether or not a story or poem was well written, thinking and talking about good writing in a formal way was new to them. Yet, their answers were appropriate.

As a group their comments about good writing showed the same kind of insight educators would be expected to provide to their classes. For example, the following explanations were given. Good writers "know how to use words in a good way," said Darusha, who elaborated further saying that "good imagery and vocabulary" (interview two) were necessary in order to use words effectively. In addition, Susan explained that good writers wrote realistically. Her example was taken from a story read to her class by a visiting author. She said that the author read a scene that involved family conflict which she said was not true to real life because "he had his daughter rebel for no reason." Susan felt that since this scene did not closely resemble real life, the author's story did not sound authentic. Finally, Eva suggested that a story was well written when the author hinted through details what a character's personality was like, instead of telling the reader what to think. She also believed that you felt like you had met the author when finished reading writing that had a well developed style.

In summary, good writing was evocative, arousing feelings in the reader; symbolic, involving thinking; imaginative, presenting interesting ideas and topics; and detailed, conveying an impression, rather than telling. Other qualitities mentioned as present in something well written included voice, imagery, vocabulary, realism, and a recognizable style.

Sharing Writing With Other Students

> *There are vultures who can't get their own ideas and they sort of look around for an idea and they*

> *steal the idea and write almost the same thing. And it's usually the good person that gets accused of stealing. (Geoffrey, interview two)*

Geoffrey disliked sharing his writing with anyone, but one or two trusted friends. He was not alone in feeling this way. With two exceptions, Darusha, who said she didn't care what other people thought, and Caroline, who unequivocally welcomed the reactions of her peers, every other student said they had experienced negative consequences from sharing their writing with other students. While Geoffrey talked in the excerpt above of his concern that ideas might be stolen, he also said that sometimes a classmate's negative personal feelings entered into a sharing situation and his work was not given a chance. Many of the other students interviewed also mentioned how vulnerable they felt sharing writing with their peers. There were various reasons for this. Sometimes comments from their peers had been too critical, which affected the way they felt about their work and ability. For example, Chereen said, "There's one person . . . who thinks she's perfect and always criticizes other people's poetry. . . . When you try to tell her some constructive criticism, she says, "Oh no, I think it's good the way it is" (interview two). Although Chereen recognized that this girl was always critical of everyone's work, she allowed the criticism to affect her self-esteem. In a second example, given by Pauline, the class wrote stories which they exchanged to proofread. Everyone discussed the ideas in the papers and compared them in a competitive way saying, "That's a good idea, but mine is better," which Pauline said made her feel like she should change her ideas even though she had thought they were good before the exchange. Classmates' comments affected these students' feelings about their writing in a negative way.

Students will only feel "safe" when there is trust. The students in this study have not learned to become objective about their writing. They are too close to what they have written to do so. Frank Smith (1982) explained that in order to examine one's own ideas more objectively, the writing must be separate from the producer. These students do not understand the purpose or benefits that can be obtained from sharing; and because they have had negative experiences sharing writing with their peers, they are easily influenced in a negative way by their classmates' comments.

Low self-esteem about their writing ability was another factor related to some of these students being fearful of their classmates' responses to their writing. For example, when asked to share his writing with his friends, Rowan was afraid they would think it was "dumb", because they had "already read books so they had something to compare it [his writing] to" (interview two). Many of the students interviewed were highly critical of their own work. Therefore, they feared ridicule from their peers.

The majority of these students were unfamiliar with assessing writing. Because they had no formal class instruction on what to look for in each other's writing, they talked primarily about the ideas, often judging these harshly. These students had also had experiences where teachers concentrated on what to improve without pointing out what was effective. For example, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, Susan thought her entire play was poorly written because the teacher hadn't talked with her about what worked.

Students become more comfortable sharing a piece of writing when they understand what they should be working towards. If the focus in the class is on the interrelationship between reading and writing, time spent discussing stories read together in class by analyzing the writer's craft can be one method of encouraging students to talk about what is effective writing. Teaching strategies that allow students to examine their own progress at crafting a story or poem and then share that information with other students may help students like Rowan to recognize what qualities in his writing are strong qualities. Understanding what is good about his writing and that writing is a developmental process may help Rowan to be less self-conscious about his ability.

A second reason why sharing certain kinds of writing was not popular with the students interviewed was because some students believed that writing revealed too much about them. Poetry was considered very personal. Darusha explained,

> I like sharing my stories because I like getting other people's comments . . . but I'm not as comfortable sharing my poetry. . . . My poetry comes straight from my heart. That's hard for me to let anyone read, even my mother. . . . Nobody should know that much about me. (interview two)

This fear of a reader knowing too much about the personal life of the writer was one more reason students were reluctant to share their writing with their peers. As mentioned by Darusha and several other students, poetry was seen to be particularly revealing, so serious poetry was seldom shared with classmates. Clearly, an atmosphere of trust was necessary.

An important issue for many of the students in this study was whose decision sharing their writing was. They were unhappy with past experiences where teachers had demanded that all students share their writing whether or not they were ready or interested. Being asked to share was most problematic at the early stages of the process. The most important reason for this was that sometimes the work was in such a developmental form that input from others might inhibit the creation of the product. Darusha explained,

> I don't like it when people try and put [their] ideas into my work. I mean it's . . . my idea and my words, but if somebody else says, "Well, why don't you put this in here?" I think it's . . . an invasion of my ideas and I don't like it. (interview two)

The other reason some of these students were opposed to sharing their writing in the early stages was that they wanted control over their ideas. As with Geoffrey, and mentioned earlier, they were afraid their ideas might be "stolen". For both reasons, students thought they should be asked whether or not they wanted to share.

A related problem was mentioned by two students who said that sometimes teachers shared or displayed writing publically without their permission. For instance, Darusha recognized a piece of her writing displayed at West Edmonton Mall. Although, flattered that her work had been chosen, she was unhappy that she wasn't consulted. Students explained that their writing belonged to them; therefore, they should have the opportunity to decide what pieces were shared.

These examples point to how important it is for teachers to respect their students' writing, particularly with regard to ownership. Also worth mentioning is that teachers need to have a deep understanding of how the composing process works in order to be aware that some students do not want to share their ideas yet, or receive input until they are ready; therefore, sharing is not appropriate at all stages.

Some students mentioned that peer-editing was awkward because classmates were often too close emotionally to what they had written and reacted personally to suggestions, even getting angry. Tania spoke from the point of view of a student who reacted this way. She admitted that although she didn't like it, she got angry with anyone who expressed disfavour with her writing. She immediately wondered what was wrong with the other person, for not appreciating her writing. She found herself writing to please the audience, instead of writing for herself. The entire process of sharing made her unhappy. Tania was interested in improving and sought other's input, but then felt the piece no longer belonged to her. Pauline explained further,

> No one wants to change anyone's ideas at all because they are afraid they're [the author] going to get mad. They don't want to change things because they don't want to hurt feelings. Sometimes you can tell. They say, "It's good," and they [do] think it's good. But sometimes when they say, "It's good," they are saying that because they have to. (interview two)

Pauline felt that being asked to peer-edit a friend's work was particularly a problem for this reason. She suggested that if teachers were going to use peer-editing, they should assign the partners. Peer-editing proved problematic when students could not distance themselves from the writing.

From my own experiences teaching I know that before students feel comfortable sharing their writing with their peers they need to understand how to receive a piece of writing. They also need to know that their writing will be respected. Two ways to help a classroom meet these requirements are to model how students should receive another student's piece of writing and to establish firm classroom guidelines about what behavior will be tolerated. Sometimes students have not had practice talking about writing; they need to develop a language, and they need to understand the social responsibilities of appropriate behavior. Donald Graves (1984) suggested using an "Author's Chair" approach to receive a piece of writing. In this method, students take turns each day reading their own stories or material published in books. At the end of each reading, the group responds by: (1) giving acceptance, saying "I liked . . . ";

and (2), asking questions about the writing. This method establishes the groundwork for a positive sharing experience. Students need a supportive atmosphere where teachers work hard to model how students should receive a piece of writing.

Sharing with Teachers and Other Adults

> *I like to show things to my Challenge teacher because he's a really creative type of guy. (Dena, interview two)*

Students had mixed reactions to the question of how they felt about sharing their writing with their teachers and other adults. The following students had shared their writing at school and it was a positive experience. Dena made special mention of her Challenge class teacher; she knew from experience that he recognized the value of her ideas. She preferred to share her writing with adults because people her own age didn't understand her work. A student who liked to share her writing with the school principal was Delvina. Finally, Geoffrey, always concerned about ideas, said he didn't mind sharing his writing with teachers because they wouldn't steal his ideas.

Three students who mentioned their unhappiness with sharing writing at school were Darusha, Chereen and Susan. Darusha felt her poetry was too personal to show her teachers, and Chereen didn't feel that she knew any of her teachers well enough. On the other hand, Susan, who was willing to share her writing, was frustrated with the lack of response she had received. She explained, "You just hand it in, get a mark and that's it" (interview two). After she had worked diligently on a story which she thought was one of her best, she would have liked her teacher to share it with the class; instead, the opportunity never arose.

In terms of sharing their writing with adults outside the school environment, all of these writers, with the exception of Jonathon and Rowan, shared their writing with a parent, relative, or adult friend. For example, Dal spoke of sharing her writing with her mom, and other family members. She reminisced about writing a story in grade five, which was laminated and given to her grandparents, because her grandfather was dying of cancer. This was a special memory for Dal.

All students said they had never had a teacher share writing with them. With two exceptions, Geoffrey and Delvina, who said they would be uncomfortable knowing how to react to a teacher's writing, the majority said they would be interested in hearing something one of their teachers had written.

When asked if they minded showing me their writing, everyone said, "No," and indicated it was not a concern and yet, as mentioned earlier, several of the students were selective about what pieces to share with me and didn't show me some of their more recent writing. With adults, as with their peers, these students feared revealing too much of themselves, having their writing misunderstood, and receiving a negative reaction that would make them feel unsuccessful. Geoffrey, explained his feelings about sharing writing well. His comments about "closing and opening the door" were no doubt the same feelings that some of the students interviewed felt, not knowing their inteviewer well.

> Geoffrey: For some reason, I'm very secretive about my writing. . . . I guess I'm that way, because its harder than I thought it was to write. I keep to myself because I'm afraid of getting hurt by other people and some people do it [offer negative criticism] on purpose. And I always seem to find the ones that do . . . so I've sort of locked it

> [showing others his writing] up. Very few people I let read my writing.
>
> Interviewer: And you didn't mind showing your writing to me, because you know I'm so interested?
>
> Geoffrey: Yes, people who are interested -- they're the people I open the door for. (interview two)

Geoffrey was the most vocal of the group to explain how other's reactions could hurt him. However, he was eager to share his writing because I was sincerely interested. In their openness with me, trust was once again, a key factor in the students' willingness to share. "To be honest on paper is difficult and risky, quite an accomplishment in itself," wrote Tom Romano (1987). "To then share those true words with others is a profound act of faith and trust. Such writing and sharing requires a willingness to become vulnerable" (p. 39). By the end of the second interviews, whether or not they had brought some of their more personal writing with them, these students were open and willing to share their honest feelings about writing. This demonstrated that they needed to know that I was sincere about respecting their vulnerability as writers before they would "open the door".

How Do You Feel about Journals?

> *I can't keep everything inside of me and . . . when you keep something inside, like a thought that is really beautiful, it gets lost . . . or else it diffuses through skin . . . and can be washed off easily. So, if you let it out . . . on paper . . . you don't have to worry about it being lost. (Tania, interview two)*

Tania was careful to explain that she kept journals at home for her own writing which were different than journals that she had kept for her language arts teachers. The journals she had kept at school were impersonal, filled with ideas and feelings that she didn't mind her teachers reading. However, she spoke eloquently of the journals that she kept at home for her own personal writing. She had five journals at home, all about one quarter full. Depending on her mood she would choose a particular journal. For example, one journal was for writing "teenager-ish" items about her social life. In another journal, she wrote only in Polish, which was her mother tongue. A third journal had important philosophical ideas. The final two journals contained poetry and short stories respectively. Tania saw journals as an important way to record things she wanted to remember.

Susan, like Tania, kept a journal at school because she was required to, but she also spoke fondly of keeping her own journal at home. Susan said her journal at home was really a "diary." She wrote about things that had happened to her, and also used it to record her thoughts. Susan felt it was fun to have a record of her life and had kept a diary since grade four. She thought that keeping a journal was a good idea for a professional writer and told me that she knew this from personal experience since her mother, a writer, kept a journal where she stored ideas in case she had writer's block.

The first time that Rebecca had ever kept a journal was in her language arts class this year. She enjoyed the experience and found it preferable to her old method which was to write down ideas on scraps of paper, fold them, staple them together, and store them in a drawer. Rebecca planned to continue keeping journals.

Tania, Susan and Rebecca all said they liked keeping journals. The remainder of the students were quite definitely opposed to keeping journals for a variety of reasons. Caroline said she didn't appreciate writing on demand and had to be in the mood to write. Therefore, it was difficult to write routinely in a journal. Three students initially looked forward to writing in journals but soon tired of the experience which they said became monotonous. In addition, five students felt there wasn't anything worth saying on a daily basis in a journal; they saw the activity as meaningless. Furthermore, Dal volunteered that although she was supposed to write a page in her journal every day, when it was due she sat down the night before and wrote. Dal thought that everyone she knew kept their journals this way. She also said that she was not comfortable writing personal thoughts in a journal for school. This made it difficult for her to find enough ideas to write in the journal. For these reasons, journal keeping at school was not a popular activity for this group.

When asked whether or not they had kept the journals I had given them to write in for this study, the response was more positive. Half of the students had written in them. Reasons why they did not write regularly were because it was a small and awkward size; they were not in the habit of keeping a journal; it was inconvenient to keep a journal; there was not enough time; and, perhaps most importantly, they didn't see the purpose of keeping a journal. Although I chose to leave the topics for writing in the journal up to the students, I gave suggestions for how they might use them. This was done deliberately to see if the students would use the journals. This was not enough direction for some; others just weren't interested.

Those who wrote in the journals used them mainly to record ideas, bit and pieces of beginnings to stories and poems, and favourite poems or songs written by others. Two students in particular mentioned positive results from keeping their journals. Darusha had written in her journal about her summer holidays and she shared it with other teens in her church group, something she felt good about since she usually did not share her writing. Susan also had a positive feeling about the journal, since she recalled sitting on the roof of the

Township Building in Brockville, Ontario, during her summer vacation writing stories that she hoped to develop further at a later date.

Tania was unique with her journal in that she wrote about what a successful school writing program should be:

> A good program should excite and arouse many moods and feelings because when you feel more, your writing . . . has more depth. A great program would make everybody interested by having challenging and entertaining topics and encouragement for creativity . . . . No one likes boring, typical work stopping activities that don't lead very far. We all like unique, exciting and different topics. Topics that excite our individuality and our personal tastes. (interview two)

While I was impressed with this student's use of her journal, I wondered if the comments were designed to please me. She may have written in the journal the way she thought I wanted her to, which meant she was writing to please the teacher. On the other hand, Tania may have felt that she could help me by making useful suggestions.

Although the majority of these students did not like keeping journals, at least for school, they all suggested that professional writers kept journals. It was seen as a good idea to record ideas for later use. This awareness indicated that although these students saw journals as useful for professional writers, they did not see journals as a meaningful tool for themselves.

Furthermore, their comments indicated that unless there was a specific purpose for writing in a journal understood by both the teacher and the students and the writing was used in a meaningful way, keeping journals was an onerous task. This made sense to me, because I had used journals with my own students in a similar way to what these able writers had encountered. For example, one year my students and I wrote in our journals every day for fifteen minutes on a topic of our choice, a topic suggested by one student that everyone might be interested in, or one I had chosen and written on the blackboard. Daily writing practice helped some reluctant writers develop a certain confidence through practice, so for some students this was successful. The problem was that for most of us, myself included, writing in our journals became a writing exercise we soon tired of doing. The students in this study appeared to have had similar journal writing experiences in their classrooms. Yet, educators like Robert Yinger (1985), advocate student use of journals as a powerful tool for learning and communicating. Yinger said that particular features of the journal such as its,

> active and personal nature, its cognitive demands and its feedback characteristics make possible [for students] the construction of new meaning and the exploration and enlargement of reality. (p. 27)

How can teachers use journals to accomplish some of these goals? It would seem to be the case that both students and teachers need to be clearer on the purpose of journals.

The key to using journals effectively may be to turn the responsibility back to students so that the journal belongs to them. However, a structure needs to be in place to assist them to come up with ideas to write about, ways to share at their discretion, and a means of self monitoring. Perhaps then, the journal will become a meaningful learning tool organized around definite goals.

The issue of confidentiality was another reason why the students in this study were not keen to use school journals to honestly record feelings. Students, like Tania, believed that being asked by the teacher to record anything personal in a school journal put them at risk. Two reasons for this were, first of all, that other students might discover private information, and, secondly, that they did not necessarily want the teacher to know anything too personal, either.

One possibility to encourage students to write with honesty in their journals would be to have students keep a journal at home which they monitor with the help of their parents, although entries would remain private. Parents would be called upon to remind students to write their journal homework only. The teacher would only see the journal at specified times, and content to be shared with the teacher would be determined by the student. With specific safeguards in place, the student's journal could become more confidential than was currently the case. .

Another use of journals would be to use them for self reflection about learning. For instance, recognizing the importance of writing to learn, some science teachers have adapted journal writing to mean "learning logs". Santa and Havens (1991), explained that learning logs were used to understand difficult concepts and new science vocabulary, in textbook reading, and to record observations during science experiments. Teachers kept their own learning logs to share with their students as part of the instructional strategy. Teacher modelling was only one step in an involved process that included asking students to use expressive writing for brainstorming what they knew or thought they knew about a topic, sharing this initial log entry with another student, writing a second entry focusing on what they learned after reading about the topic, sharing this new entry, and then finally writing about how this process enabled them to learn. "It is essential that students understand why informal writing is a powerful tool for learning. . . . If students know why writing works, they are more likely to use it as one of their own learning strategies" (p. 124). As teachers learn more about how to use journals with their students, learning logs may become an instructional tool in all subjects including language arts where students use learning logs to write what they know and have learned about writing, from writing to learn about writing.

Writing at Home Versus Writing at School

> *I like going to the bus stop, sitting there and watching the people, that gives me great ideas -- the classroom is so confined and restricted. . . . I don't do my compositions . . . in the class. It's just too hard. I just go wherever I feel like [writing]. (Dena, interview one)*

Dena found it difficult to write in the classroom. Instead, she preferred to write somewhere outside where she could concentrate yet still watch life happening. Like Dena, the majority of these students indicated that it was easier to write at home than at school. Problems concentrating at school were the result of classroom interruptions like announcements, visitors and bells, and other distractions like fellow students talking. For example, Rowan found that assigned writing topics and deadlines at school made him feel pressured. When he wrote at school, Rowan said he only wrote to finish, and his writing was not creative. In contrast, he felt his writing at home was much better. Rowan also liked the freedom of writing in his room because he enjoyed moving around, walking in circles when he thought through a story. Another example of a student who preferred to write from the comfort of home was Darusha who usually composed "lying down in a darkened place" (interview two).

Two students said it was easier to write at school because that was the only place they found time to write. Jonathon explained that at home his little sister bothered him and kept him busy. He also said that at school there were books to help him discover writing ideas. Caroline found writing at school easier because her teacher set assignments and then gave class time to complete their work. This meant that she was able to finish her work on time.

Four students said the location did not make a difference. Delvina and Susan said this was because they wrote whenever and wherever they were when they had an inspiration. However, they explained that this usually happened at school. Virginia could write at school because she was able to block out distractions. Tania also could write anywhere, although she qualified this by saying that she was quite moody about the times and conditions that allowed her to write.

However, Rebecca wrote school or self-sponsored writing according to the location. She was the only student who said that she wrote school writing assignments in her classroom and poetry before or after school at home.

Writing in the classroom was seen by the majority of the students interviewed as a difficult place to work. There were too many distractions. Also, several of these students had special places to write at home where they felt more creative, or could relax. Therefore, writing at home was preferred over writing at school.

The Physical Appearance of the Ideal Writing Classroom

> *It would be an isolated room [with] isolated compartments, like little offices. Glass sealed so you could see [and] call the teacher and have everything that you need -- if you need a snack, if you need a drink. It would have a little desk in it or a computer, something that you can do your work on. And then when the end of the period is up, you're refreshed because there's no one bothering*

> *you. You are happy because you got a lot of work done. You were totally isolated. No one pestering you for ideas, answers, harassing you in any way that you can't write. (Geoffrey, interview two)*

As Geoffrey mentioned in his answer about the ideal writing classroom, the seating arrangement of the room was the most important physical feature to these students. While his vision included isolated compartments, most of the other students favoured a variety of seating arrangements to accommodate different stages of the writing process. For instance, Rebecca suggested separate sections for writing and talking. She explained that it was important that the two sections be completely separated. Rowan's ideal writing room was so divided that students sat in distinct areas for writing (for example fantasy stories or working on dialogue), and then received assistance from professional authors specifically in those areas of specialization or needed development.

Other students made comments concerning the mood of the room. For example, Susan wanted the room to be painted with a range of different bright colours, while Jonathon thought that the room should contain many different books for writers to get help with ideas. Whatever else happened the room should not be a boring place to write according to Dal. Finally, Rebecca suggested that the classroom should be quiet and peaceful, like her bedroom with sunlight, pillows, and plants. If the students interviewed agreed on one single facet of the ideal writing classroom, it was that there be a quiet place to work.

In order for the classroom to be ideal, the students felt that teachers should set certain guidelines. They suggested that teachers should show students examples of different writing that they expected, help students to publish their writing, set realistic deadlines for assignments, and set a classroom atmosphere that promoted writing. One final suggestion was that the writers should decide which times were best for writing and for sharing, and not the teacher.

Geoffrey was the only student who mentioned the importance of support from the home in connection with the ideal writing environment. He said that his mother gave him encouragement and wanted to hear everything he had written. To Geoffrey, this recognition from home meant a great deal; he compared his mother's enthusiasm towards his writing with his friend's athletic accomplishment of winning 120 ribbons in competitions, and told me that he was luckier than his friend.

It was interesting that these students volunteered suggestions about the things that teachers could do to make the classroom ideal, because this was not an area that I had focused on, with this question. However, the emotional, social and intellectual atmosphere of a classroom can not be divorced from the physical arrangement, which these youngsters had recognized. For example, students suggested that teachers assign reasonable assignment deadlines, set clear guidelines for their expectations of student work, show examples of what work is expected, help students publish writing, and involve students in classroom decisions about time allottment for different aspects of writing instruction. The next section deals with suggestions for teachers in a more comprehensive way than will be dealt with here. However, a couple of points can be made here.

First of all, some of the ideas these students gave for creating the ideal physical environment can be incorporated into a regular classroom. One way is to divide the classroom into different instructional groupings where students can work quietly without talking if they are writing, and discuss a story with a partner if they need new ideas. While this is not ideal, it does allow those students who can block noise to concentrate better. Another way to work within the physical limits of the classroom is to have the teacher direct that for a set time period, say the next twenty minutes of the period, there be no talking; but, after that, some students can work with a partner, while others continue composing alone. This proposed method means that all students would have to work towards being at the same place at the same time, which defeats the whole purpose of working creatively at an individual pace. However, for those students who can write only when there is quiet, it means that there will be part of the period where they are successful.

Another place to look at change is within the teacher. These students have said that they want teachers to listen to what they say about existing structures, such as unrealistic deadlines which impede their ability to write. Other areas where students can help us to provide a classroom atmosphere more conducive to writing involve including them in the daily decisions about instruction, for example deciding when they should share their writing or letting them choose their own writing topics. These are areas where teachers can bring about change, becoming more flexible in classroom organization to meet a wider range of needs.

Do You Have Suggestions for Me as a Writing Teacher?

> *There are different people in a classroom. You have to think about that. You have to think of each person as a person, not a name or a number. I wouldn't favour anybody, especially good writers. (Eva, interview two)*

Eva was one of several students who suggested that instruction should be individualized to accommodate different writing speeds, learning styles, and abilities of student writers. Since these students had a history of being successful at school, this interest in their fellow writers was interesting! According to the students, able writers and less successful writers had in common the need for special assistance, which wasn't addressed when the whole class had the same instruction. Eva's suggestion that I should individualize instruction was only one of the many suggestions offered by this group of students. Other areas where advice was given included topics, expectations, teacher guidance with revision and editing, marking, sharing, teaching grammar, and involving students in planning.

The majority of students recommended that writers be allowed to choose their own topics. Rowan spoke for others, when he said this was the only way to encourage kids to be creative. Otherwise, suggestions about the kinds of topics that worked best involved teacher-assigned topics that were general and could be easily adapted to suit the writer. Geoffrey felt that with teacher-assigned topics room for creativity was important; otherwise "you force feed them some junk they don't like . . . and you're probably going to notice the difference when they write" (interview two). Chereen also thought that topics that were too narrow were difficult because "you knew exactly what you had to write, and sometimes writing something the teacher was expecting didn't work" (interview two). Pauline thought a list of two pages of general topics would help. Some students said that if the choice of topics was too wide open, it would be difficult for some students who needed more help.

Finally, Eva and Caroline recommended giving students a choice of their own topic, or a teacher-suggested topic. Caroline thought it was important to allow students this choice because, "If people like writing, they'll probably like writing about something they already know" (interview two). Caroline's idea that students write best about what they are the most knowledgeable about was supported by Deborah

McCutchen (1986). She explained, "there are multiple sources of knowledge that contribute to writing skill, but very clear in the data is the effect of knowledge of topic: children generated more coherent texts about topics they knew well" (p.441).

Expectations was another area where advice was given. Several students said that teachers needed to provide students with clearer expectations of what they wanted. For example, Pauline thought I should "read students some examples of what you expect," whereas Chereen said it was important to present different types of writing so students knew that "there was more than one way to write" (interview two). Also suggested was setting a daily writing goal so that everyone knew what to work on that day. (Pauline, interview two)

Another example of setting reasonable teacher expectations was the issue of time to write. Throughout this study, these students indicated that they were not often given reasonable assignment deadlines. One student suggested that allowing students the weekend to complete a story would be particularly beneficial because they needed time to think without pressure or confusion in order to write their best (Rowan, interview two). Time was also seen as an important factor to consider in recognizing the creative process of these writers. Some students said they needed time to think through their ideas. They wanted their teachers to recognize that sometimes intervals of time were needed during the writing of a story in order for them to write well.

Finally, Darusha pointed out one reason against having guidelines that were too restrictive. She said there should be enough flexibility so that the whole class doesn't have to do the same thing. Students who liked writing would "botch an assignment" if required to write with a partner, because strong writers preferred to work independently (interview two).

Students were in agreement that teachers should mark writing for mechanical errors, but not ideas. Rebecca stated this concern well. She said that if a teacher tells her a poem is good except for "this and this [certain ideas] and his opinion is different than yours" it really bothers her if "they mark it worse because of the difference," because it is her poem (interview two).

Dal was one of several students who felt that it was especially important to recognize that poetry writing involved a personal interpretation of feelings and ideas, which was difficult to mark fairly. She explained:

> I wrote that "Black and Blue" poem and got the same mark as everyone else and I felt, "Oh this is so much better than hers!" Sometimes I think it's good if you just get an effort mark for poetry with things underlined or circled that the teacher liked. (interview two)

Students like Dal felt cheated when they had worked hard on a poem and then received it back with only a number and no explanation.

Two students had opinions about how grammar should be taught. First of all, Dal told me that she had a teacher who taught only grammar and another teacher who taught only creative writing, and didn't believe in teaching grammar. Dal said these were two extremes and that "if you really notice that kids need it [grammar], then teach it" (interview two). However, the other student who mentioned grammar, Rowan, believed that grammar was necessary but should be taught as a separate subject from writing. "Writing should encourage creativity; grammar should be something students find as errors in their work and correct" (Rowan, interview two).

Several students indicated that they would like more involvement in classroom decisions about writing. For instance, Caroline felt that teachers should ask their students about what they would like to study prior to the opening of a new unit. Then, she said language arts would be more interesting and students wouldn't be able to complain because they had made the decision of what to do next. Other examples where students wanted involvement in the decision making covered every area of writing instruction in a classroom from topics and deadlines, to marks and sharing.

Teresa Amabile's research supports allowing children autonomy in learning as a motivation for creative productivity. In a study of pre-school children allowed to choose materials to make collages, Amabile (1987) concluded that external factors such as too many controls, and lack of autonomy are imposed constraints that may interfere with children's creativity. Amabile believes that self-directed learning has a greater chance of being creative. Furthermore, she suggests that students should learn to enjoy the challenge of the learning experience itself and not rely on outside controls, motivation or evaluation. Caroline's assertion that student participation would help the writing classroom may be an answer to how to intrinsically motivate young writers. Writing becomes an activity that students choose to participate in because producing something creative is rewarding; rewarding situations may occur when decision making and goal setting become the learner's responsibilities.

Several students said that they needed more help with revision and editing. Pauline suggested that teachers could walk around the classroom asking students if they needed help. She added that sometimes students who needed help wouldn't ask for it, because they thought the teacher would remember when marking time came, and penalize them. Delvina thought that a teacher could read over a student's writing and point out various areas for revision in a way that could teach students what to look for next time. Dal really liked the fact that her teacher revised their work in pencil, instead of red ink, because she felt it was a gentler approach. Eva said students should be shown how to revise. Her advice was to:

> Show them something you've written that you have revised. You go, "Look I did this and this is what I found wrong with it. Read this paragraph. Read what I wrote before." They read it. Say, "Okay, this is the revision. That's how I revised it." And then you say, "This is what I want you to do. This is what I'm trying to get from you because I know it is hard." (interview two)

Eva's suggested method for teaching children how to revise was not unlike an experience I had teaching my students to use appropriate paragraph divisions in narrative writing. I found that when the students came up to the overhead projector and showed me where they thought the divisions should be, they had no trouble editing their own papers for paragraph divisions. However, prior to that lesson, we had discussed making the divisions and the students had taken notes but the information had not been transferred to their own work. I learned from experience that the hands-on instruction was a superior strategy. Mark Aulls (1985) said that children need demonstration lessons in order to learn skills. He accused formal schooling of relying "too much on telling and explaining and too little on showing students how to learn" (p.43).

Most of the students interviewed were strongly in favour of sharing their work at a later stage of development as opposed to earlier in the process. Pauline's explanation for this was the same one heard often; to share writing at the formative stages, especially before the ideas were written down on paper was to risk having them stolen. Once they were recorded, she explained, the ideas belonged to the writer. The other problem with sharing work at the beginning was that sometimes ideas in a formative stage were criticized, which made the writer uncertain about whether or not to continue the writing. Yet, these students saw value in hearing other students' work and recognized that they could learn from this sharing opportunity, as long as it happened at a later part of the writing process. It was also pointed out that once a writer was finished and had revised the writing, sharing was more a chance to celebrate and constructive criticism was not welcome since the story was finished.

Several students commented that they would appreciate it if their teachers shared their writing. This was because writing was seen as a difficult process and these students felt it would be benefical for all students to see that teachers also struggled with their writing. Tania, one of the students who thought this would be useful, advised me to, "Tell a lot about yourself, have a really family-like, sunny atmosphere -- really be open, and share some of your writing" (interview two).

Finally, students gave advice on how to assist writers with varying levels of need. Stronger writers were said to need help by being given specific criticism. For instance, Rebecca said to take an able writer aside at noon hour and tell her everything she could do to improve a poem. She said that otherwise able writers consistently achieve high marks on their written work without any explanation, and this causes little incentive for them to improve. Dal also said that good writers need to know where they should expand ideas.

Writers with difficulty proved to be an area where almost every student offered helpful ideas. Geoffrey said that these writers needed "a great deal of encouragement." He added that perhaps some students who have difficulty face hardships at home and find it hard to be creative at school. When they hear stories written by other students who find writing less difficult, Geoffrey explained, "they just turn off" (interview two). Other suggestions were to let students work together to write a story which would help students who had trouble finding ideas. Also suggested was to help troubled writers be creative and develop their confidence first, and then work on skills. In addition, Rebecca believed that students with problems writing needed to read a wide selection of poetry and stories to help them understand what kinds of writing exist.

Finally, Virginia thought that those who had difficulty writing probably hated it and then it was hard to "put your heart into writing," which she said was reflected in the quality they produced. She suggested that a teacher should separate students into two groups based on whether or not they enjoyed writing. Students would be allowed to choose which of the two groups they wanted to work in, with the teacher's discretion. She explained that the teacher could then introduce a writing assignment and focus in on a particular area of need, like the introduction for example, putting those students together who wanted help.

> I've heard of programs with neat little games and stuff that help you work with these kids so that they can come up with an introduction and stuff. Do that in the beginning of the year and work on it for awhile and then you would have accomplished something. Their writing skills would eventually increase. (Virginia, interview two)

In this way, those who didn't need help could complete the task without having to wait for the others, and those who needed it, would get assistance.

In summary, able writers had many suggestions to make that would help me improve the teaching of writing in my classroom. They offered advice on setting topics, having clear classroom expectations for writing, providing instruction with revision and editing, marking for mechanical errors and not ideas, allowing students to determine sharing times, balancing grammar instruction with encouragement of ideas, cooperative planning, and strategies to assist able and struggling writers.

A Conclusion to the Chapter

Chapter Six dealt with some questions that fell under the category of writing in the classroom. Students commented on what qualities constituted good writing, how they felt about sharing their writing with peers and adults, discussed the area of journals, compared writing at home to writing at school, proposed a vision of the ideal classroom, and suggested ways to improve teaching instruction.

First of all, the students said that good writing possessed the following qualities. It caused the reader to respond in some way on a feeling level; used symbolism effectively; presented ideas in an imaginative way; was original; included details; had vivid, precise vocabulary; contained imagery; was authentic; and had a distinct voice and style.

Secondly, comments about sharing writing showed that it was seen as a personal activity which required trust. Therefore, the students in this study made it clear that sharing and publishing should occur only under certain circumstances when the writer's permission was given. Peer acceptance was paramount and the reactions of their peers to their writing impacted on self-esteem. They worried about such issues as whether or not their classmates would appreciate their writing, and if their ideas might be stolen. Even with adults, trust was important. Some of these students remembered disappointing experiences when they showed their writing to a parent or teacher. Although none of the students had ever had teachers who shared their writing, generally they were in favour of the idea.

There were mixed reviews about keeping journals. While these writers could see why professional authors might keep journals, they were unclear about why they should keep them. They were also reluctant to write in classroom assigned journals because they were afraid of losing their anonymity and having the teacher or classmates know personal information. Classroom journals were written primarily to please the teacher. Since the purpose for keeping journals was unclear, students often felt they were a meaningless activity. The student journals kept for the purpose of this research were received more favourably, probably because students were allowed to write on any topics they were interested in, and the writing could be kept personal, although once again lack of purposefulness was seen as a problem.

In the section on writing at home versus writing at school, students explained that because of distractions from outside the classroom like announcements, bells, and visitors, and because of disruptions from within, like fellow students talking, writing at home was much easier.

The ideal writing classroom was an attitude as well as an environment where students were encouraged to be individuals. For example, students said that the ideal physical arrangement allowed writers to work quietly when they needed to, and noisily when they sought the assistance of others. However, the ideal social, emotional, and intellectual atmosphere was warm and encouraging because teachers listened to students' needs, set fair deadlines, and involved them in decision making.

When asked what suggestions these students could give me about returning to teaching I was overwhelmed by the number of different but useful responses and the students' enthusiasm. Particularly noteworthy was the sincere desire shown by these youngsters to help those classmates with difficulty. The message that came through the clearest was to treat students as individuals and to plan my instruction accordingly. Caught up in pressure from their peer groups, needing to use writing to explore situations and feelings, students cry out to be recognized for what makes them unique. The following poem written by Dal, demonstrates some of the anxiety that teenagers face daily.

Unique

I walked by a cluster of my peers.
An unhealthy white stick
Sat in the corner of many of their mouths,
A cigarette.
They were now cool.

I took in a breath
Of the crisp morning air
Filled with smoke.

Incredible,
An unhealthy addictive thing
Could make someone's popularity
Jump.

Pain filled my gut
I knew I wasn't accepted,
Pain filled my lungs
Because they were being coated with tar.

I could feel my life shortening.
And my life was too important.

Dal, (interview two)

Encouraging students to write on topics they are personally knowledgeable about, like Dal's poem "Unique;" communicating expectations to students while allowing individual differences in working styles; working with students on a one-to-one basis, to give them revision and editing assistance; marking students' writing in a way that accommodates different points of view; permitting students to share when they are ready; teaching grammar when students need to use it; encouraging individual creativity; inviting students to participate in choosing units to study; and working differently with able writers than developing writers are all ways that teachers can show flexibility in teaching writing.

Chapter Seven

Teaching and Researching Writing: Considerations for Teaching

An Introduction to the Chapter

Chapter Seven summarizes my research with able writers. Issues of specific relevance to my interests and experience as a classroom teacher of many years and issues that the students raised through the interviews are organized around themes. These six themes are called: "Writing is an Individual Matter;" "Writing is Inspiration, so Revision is Meaningless;" "Memories of Reading and Writing;" "Self-Sponsored Versus School Writing;" "Computers, Poetry, Journals and Correctness;" and "Correctness, Self-Esteem and the Willingness to Share."

Since this chapter summarizes the significant findings of my study it is written in the style of Chapters One and Two. I am no longer reporting the data, so student quotations are not used to introduce each section Instead, the chapter is arranged so that following each theme there are suggestions for teachers. In this way, I hope to provide a practical application for teachers for the research data I have obtained and summarized. Finally, Chapter Seven concludes by returning to the central issue of this research -- why teachers should listen to student writers.

Writing Is an Individual Matter.

From every perspective having to do with writing, whether beginning to write, deciding how to revise, or discussing a finished piece of writing, the students in this study indicated through their comments that they were individuals with their own distinct ways of writing and making sense of the world. For instance, along with the more traditional methods of rehearsal such as brainstorming, various students told me that they used drawing, painting, writing poetry, walking in circles, dreaming, and visualizing as pre-writing activities. Listening to each student's story of how they prepared to write was fascinating. Learning about variations in pre-writing activities was only the beginning, however, because throughout the course of my research I realized that no matter what question I asked, students' answers varied tremendously according to the individual. This section of Chapter Seven provides examples to show this diversity.

One of the first questions students were asked was what practice they used to begin writing a poem or story. Their answers ranged from using automatic writing to discover what to write, to pre-planning the entire story before writing it down. Most students in this study, however, were in the middle, using a combination of planning and discovering; although the amount of planning and discovering used depended once again on the individual. Therefore, the research indicates that for students beginning to write "one writes best as one learn's best, at one's own pace" (Emig, 1977, p.126).

Other writing idiosyncrasies involved students' preferences about where they felt the most comfortable writing. Nine students preferred to write at home because class noises, intercom interruptions, bells, talking and the many disruptions of the classroom made writing at school frustrating. Of the remaining students interviewed, four indicated that they could write anywhere, two preferred to write at school because they needed to be disciplined to write, and finally, one wrote school assignments at school and her own writing at home. Once again, students had preferences for where they felt the most comfortable writing that varied according to the individual.

Revision proved an interesting subject to question the students about because whether or not revision occurred depended on so many different factors. For example, students were influenced by how well they understood the purpose of revision, whether or not they considered a piece of writing to be finished, what particular method of composing they used, and whether the writing was a school assignment the teacher had told them they had to revise. Differences in practice were that some students revised as they wrote, others revised after they had written, and a few did not revise at all. Some students volunteered that they only revised when it was required of them by the teacher. This admission was complicated by the fact that some students made only cosmetic changes to meet this school requirement, so no real revision took place in these situations, either. In addition, since students understood revision to mean many different things, the amount that each student revised varied substantially. For example, students who understood the purpose of revision were happy to make content changes at a separate time from making editing changes. However, others who did not understand the term, or felt their work was substantially finished, proofread it only for mechanical errors and called this process revision. Finally, students who did not understand that revision was a distinct process, or corrected anything they considered to be a mistake as soon as they noticed it, made corrections to the content and mechanical errors at the same time.

One final area of revision where students differed had to do with whether or not they felt their writing was inspired. For example, students generally believed that when they wrote poetry the ideas "came to them". Several students felt that by revising poetry they would lose the spontanaeity of the piece and spoil the overall effect. Therefore, they were reluctant to revise poetry. However, the same student who saw poetry that way might believe that it was essential to revise a short story in order for it to work. Once again there were differences among the students with regard to their attitudes, habits, knowledge, and acceptance of revision. In conclusion, since each student understood and used revision differently, it was difficult to find any similarities at all within this group.

The majority of these students thought of themselves as writers in some sense of the word, depending on each youngster's notion of writer. For example, some were writers because their peers acknowledged their ability to write and asked them to edit class writing or share what they were currently writing, while others were writers because their teachers and parents recognized that they had ability. Then again, some students were writers because they had been able to get their writing published in a magazine or some other form. Other students were writers because they liked to write. In addition, because some students could successfully express their feelings and ideas on paper, they were writers. Also, one student said she was a writer because she had finished a piece of writing which was hard work. Interestingly enough, two students made the distinction that they were amateur writers because they weren't old enough to be real writers. Finally, a few students were writers because they made the commitment to write. This medley of responses was given to the question of "Are you a writer?"

Other areas where there were tremendous variations among responses were writing growth, improvement and style. First of all, when asked how they had grown as writers, students gave so many different examples and explained their growth in such diverse ways, that there were few common themes. They said: writing about real experiences, sharing writing, use of symbolism, writing better endings, filling in the gaps in stories with details, improving spelling, writing at home more, writing about deeper things, writing realistically, using better character description, writing more, writing essays, extending vocabulary, writing about feelings, thinking more, using better verbs, and understanding how to use quotations marks and commas (interview two). From the diversity of the responses in this list it is clear that the students, in a collective sense, measured their growth in numerous ways. Yet, each writer's answer was a sign of where the individual stood in terms of writing development. In their responses to this question, no two writers responded in the same way.

Next came the students' suggestions of how they could improve their writing. Again, the responses were manifold in content and number. To illustrate, students said they could improve their writing by learning to write poetry using different voices, writing in a way that sounded more mature, varying wording and pacing, using realism, publishing, receiving constructive criticism, developing strategies to improve specific areas, collecting facts for expository writing, improving vocabulary, writing ideas down, reading other writers, making endings more realistic, setting and meeting deadlines, improving spelling, finishing a story, using colourful adjectives, experimenting, improving beginnings, joining a writing class, using a dictionary, improving editing, learning to effectively use line breaks in poetry, developing characters through dialogue instead of description, inventing better names for characters and titles, and learning more control (interview two). These answers proved that each child knew one way at least that he or she could improve. Again, each writer responded in a way that was unparallelled by any other.

Finally, when asked to describe what made their writing unique, each student thought for a moment and then described some unique aspect. Included here is a list of everyone's responses. First of all, some students said that what was unique about their writing was whether or not they included feelings. For example, some students felt that the way they responded to a particular issue was different than other people's responses in terms of the way they wrote about the issue. Since they were writing about an area where they had deep personal feelings, they may have been talking about whether or not the writing had a distinguishable voice. In a related case, some students said their particular word choice was recognizable. Also mentioned was the absence or presence of action versus description and dialogue. For example, Rowan was proud to write compelling fantasy adventure stories and mentioned this as an example; whereas, Geoffrey thought his detailed description was a significant feature of his writing. Another area had to do with whether or not the style was simplistic or wordy. For instance, some students felt their writing had a terse, concise style, and others liked to experiment with word choice in a more elaborate way. In addition, two students said they chose titles that no one else would like. Also, one student thought her writing stood out because she liked to write fast-paced action into her beginnings and then tell the remainder of the story in the form of a flashback. Finally, one other characteristic that some students said distinguished their writing from others was the way they wrote their poetry around particular themes that were personal favourites. I was impressed with how well the students articulated what was unique about their writing.

Whether commenting on signs of growth, ways to improve, or what was unique about their writing, these students talked intelligently. Although much older and more experienced with writing, I found these conversations intellectually stimulating. We discussed many issues, such as those mentioned above, that these youngsters had never been asked to consider before. This meant that sometimes through the course of the interviews we made discoveries together about writing that were exciting! It is difficult to capture on paper the texture of our discussions, or the complex profile of each able teenage writer that emerged with each interview. However, through the students' answers to questions about writing growth, development and uniqueness, it became clear that the knowledge this group possessed was unprecedented by any group of teenagers I had ever taught.

Vast differences existed among these students in every area of writing discussed in this study; this uniqueness will have implications for teachers. Students in their classrooms also possess unique ideas, different writing preferences and varied levels of writing experience. Knowing that writing is such an individual matter means that teachers must find ways to individualize their writing programs, if students are going to learn to write.

How can teachers incorporate differences in learning style, ability, and experience into their language arts writing program? One suggestion is to use cooperative learning groups that are established around particular areas of need in writing as identified by the students and the teacher together. For example, students who needed help getting started could join one group. Other groups might be for students working on free verse poetry, working at writing realistic dialogue, whatever areas were topical and needed attention. The teacher could rotate and join different groups as the need arose, but often the groups would rely on the expertise of each other for feedback, suggestions, and ideas.

Another suggestion mentioned often by the students is the physical organization of the classroom. If the classroom is organized so that there are writing areas, and peer editing, or discussion areas, students have more flexibility. A caution to watch for in this situation is that classroom guidelines are firmly in place, since the students in this study mentioned that it was usually difficult to write in the classroom because of all the distractions. Instead of re-structuring the classroom in terms of physical space, teachers could be flexible with the way they established time, having quiet working times for writing or working on some aspect of the story that can be done individually, and providing noisier times for other activities related to the writing process, such as discussing ideas, or offering feedback to stories. One of the easiest ways to provide for student differences is to spend time as a class discussing how everyone writes, so that students can see that tremendous variations exist. In this way, teachers can work on establishing the emotional and intellectual atmosphere of the classroom so that the same flexibility occurs as with physical arrangement of space, only this flexibility is in students' expectations of themselves and others. In recent years the workshop instructional strategy has become popular with teachers primarily because it allows students to work individually at their own pace. At the junior high level, Nancie Atwell (1987) explains in her book, In the Middle. Writing. Reading and Learning With Adolescents, how to organize a classroom around reading and writing workshop. Teachers may find the instructional and organizational strategies in Atwell's book helpful.

In conclusion, these are some of the ways that teachers can accomodate individual student differences in learning style, ability and experience in the writing classroom, because as Geoffrey said, "Each writer is as individual as a fingerprint" (interview two).

Writing Is Inspiration so Revision Is Sometimes Seen as Meaningless

These writers talked about their writing in terms of waiting for an idea, reworking a piece if a new idea came, or writing when they felt moved to write. Talking about writing as waiting for a good idea meant that many of the students viewed writing as inspiration. Maintaining the original idea or being able to bring new ideas to a piece determined whether or not the story would be completed. As well as finding ideas, students worried about losing good ideas. For this reason, some of these writers collected ideas and beginnings to stories, and kept them safely in their desk drawers at home to be developed at some later time. For others the fear of losing a good idea or being unable to maintain a beginning idea meant fear of failure, and a reluctance to rework their writing for fear of tampering with, or losing, the integrity of their original ideas.

In terms of revision, some students were concerned that if they made too many changes to something they had written, their writing would lose its originality. These students saw poetry in particular, as a type of writing where inspiration was essential, not craft. Poetry was something written in one sitting as long as "you had the ideas." To revise poetry meant to lose the inspiration that had inspired the poem. Therefore, students who were reluctant to revise writing of any kind for fear of losing the originality of the piece possessed a limited understanding of the term "revision".

In general, however, "revision" meant something different to each student. For example, one of the students reworked her piece several times until she was satisfied that it sounded right, but when asked if she revised, she said "no". For students who wrote this way, revision was synonymous with "editing" because part of making sure the piece "sounded right" involved finding mechanical errors. Another student said he revised when finished writing the first draft; but when asked to explain, he described revision in terms of finding spelling and editing errors only. He had no conception of using revision as a technique to look at the content. These were only some of the different ways that students viewed revision.

Some students who revised, needed an interval of time between writing the original draft and any revision, in order for their ideas to develop. To these students, finding the time to devote to a story was a critical factor of whether or not they would revise and finish a piece. If the student returned to the piece after a certain amount of time and felt able to add new ideas, he or she would finish it. Therefore, time was an important factor.

An issue related to time, involved revising a piece of writing that had been left for two years. This happened with Susan, who made an interesting discovery about revision during the interviews. She revised a story written two years earlier because she wanted to have something to show me for the interview. She was pleased that she could feel good about being able to return to something previously written. This student indicated that she would re-write other pieces again in the future because the experience had been so positive. Furthermore, Susan observed that reworking the piece brought back to her the feelings she had originally felt. Finally, she found this an interesting experience, almost like stepping back in time.

In general, these students saw revision as hard work that was "boring". For this reason, some of them would not revise unless they were required to by the teacher. In a few cases, students revised by making only cosmetic changes to the piece so the teacher would think they had revised it, when in reality they hadn't altered the piece in any substantial way.

Teresa Amabile (1987) called the desire to finish a project simply for the pleasure of the experience itself, intrinsic motivation. Some students chose not to revise because they weren't committed or interested enough in the piece. In some cases, this may have been because the students did not feel any ownership in their writing since all aspects of the writing assignment were controlled by the teacher. Also, these students did not understand the purpose of revision. In several cases the students were asked to revise without being shown how, or given any explanation why, they should revise. Crowley said:

> The desire to work at refining a written idea presupposes a strong committment on the part of the writer. Although the writer must consider his reader's needs, it is inner dedication to the task which produces an eventual sense of satisfaction. (1988, p. 415)

Some of these students saw revision as a meaningless activity, because they had no "inner dedication" to it. These students may not feel any intrinsic motivation to finish their writing by revising it, because the writing is not self-initiated and they do not understand why they should revise writing.

However, these students were interested in learning how to improve their writing. Many of these writers wanted specific criteria that explained what was strong about their writing and strategies to show them step-by-step how to revise their writing in areas where improvement was needed. They indicated a desire to improve their writing technique.

How can teachers help students with revision? First of all, students need to understand that writing involves more than inspiration. Explaining how writing is a process with many stages, as diverse as writers themselves, and that revision is a necessary part of that process may help students to realize this. Secondly, teachers need to talk about the importance of time to mull over ideas, or "percolate" ideas as Tom Romano (1987), calls it. Teachers can point out that sometimes writers need an interval of time before completing a piece, and that the amount of time needed varies with the individual and the piece of writing. Then, recognizing the importance of this, teachers can make sure that the assignment time allotted is flexible. Another idea involves Susan's experience with revising a story from previous years, mentioned earlier. Students can be encouraged to rework earlier pieces, or consider earlier writing as a source for new writing ideas. Perhaps most importantly, however, students need to understand why the teacher is asking them to revise, in order to want to revise. Teachers can model revision using the overhead projector and their own writing to demonstrate, choosing one area at a time to revise. Then their students can follow this same process using a piece of their own writing. In time, some students in the classroom may volunteer to have their pieces revised on the overhead as an example for the class. One final suggestion for teachers to help students understand writing better is to invite guest writers and editors into classrooms to provide information on how authors revise. These suggestions are a few ways for teachers to help students with revision.

Memories of Reading and Writing.

When asked if they could remember when they first learned to read and write, the students responded overwhelmingly that yes, they could. In terms of reading, all the students remembered the first books they ever read, and when they first learned to read. In addition, the majority were also read to as children, and had favorite childhood books that were read to them. Given this early familiarity with the world of literature, it is not surprising then, that almost all of these children continue to enjoy reading today When it came to remembering a writing history, the results were similar to reading. Although the age that each child learned to write was different, all students remembered the first story they wrote whether at a very early age or as in the case of one student, not until grade six. Many of the students also remembered excelling at writing in the early grades and continue to write well today.

The whole area of recalling early memories about reading and writing ability has exciting possibilities for further study with able writers. For example, these students remembered what they had written so well that they could tell the plot of their first stories; but also, they remembered the plots or themes of all of the stories they had ever written and some had written many. This is fascinating information, because it suggests that memory may play a strong role in the development of writing ability. It would be interesting to know if other students not considered to be able writers are also able to remember their early literacy development.

A related observation can be made here about how several of these students used memory to compose. On several occasions these students spoke of visualizing the story they were writing, or remembering details from something they wanted to capture on paper. Again, this begs the question of whether or not the ability to remember in such detail that one can visualize a scene while writing it, is something that students who are not able writers can do.

In nearly all homes, literacy activities were valued. For instance, earlier in childhood, storytelling was valued in some homes. Sometimes parents made up stories that were told to the children at bedtime. In other cases, families had special stories they shared when they all got together. Other examples of literacy being modelled in the home were parents who read for recreation, or wrote for various reasons. Examples of family members who wrote were one father who had written a thesis, a mother who was a novelist, and a grandfather who had published poetry. Storytelling, reading and writing were activities prevalent in most of these students' homes.

How can knowing about our students' reading and writing histories help teachers teach writing? First of all, understanding that some students come from backgrounds where literacy is encouraged, and that other students don't, may help teachers to design classroom situations that take these differences into account. Children who are familiar with the language of writing and comfortable with expressing their ideas on paper have an advantage over students who do not have this background. In the same way, children who are strong readers have a familiarity with vocabulary and an understanding of how stories are told from reading that children without this background do not have. We know that in some homes, reading and writing are not valued activities. Therefore, teachers aware of such discrepancies can provide students with weak literacy backgrounds with a more concentrated approach to reading and writing. Lessons can be modified to meet all backgrounds. For example, instead of making the assumption that all students have a solid understanding of how to read a short story, the teacher cognizant of individual and cultural differences will provide questions at a variety of levels of thinking, helping with comprehension questions for those students with a limited literary background, while asking evaluative questions of technique for those students who are ready for more of a challenge. As with writing, literary responses can be shared orally so that students realize diversity of approaches to understanding a story or poem. Enjoyment and engagement with literature can be experienced at any age. Junior-high writers can learn from such discussions whether or not they have had much previous literary experience.

Secondly, knowing that some students can remember early writing and reading histories is useful when working with students to help them recognize growth. Teachers may suggest to students that they bring in stories written in earlier grades to discuss with a view to setting goals and looking at growth. The students in this study enjoyed looking back at earlier works they had written. Students may decide to include some of their earlier stories in their writing files as a reminder of how they have grown.

Self-Sponsored Versus School Writing.

Students' comments indicated several differences between writing that was school assigned and their own personal, or self-sponsored writing. For example, in terms of getting started writing, two students wrote outlines only for school assignments. In a second example, one student pre-planned assignments for school and preferred to discover what to write about for her own writing. Similarly, differences existed between school and self-sponsored writing when it came to revision. Most students only revised writing to be handed in to the teacher if the teacher demanded it. Yet, students who valued revision, said they needed time to think about the piece before adding further ideas or making revisions. Therefore, for these students, revision might occur on self-sponsored writing if they decided it was worthwhile to continue working on a story, because they could allow the necessary interval of time, whereas revision on school stories was impossible for lack of time; again unless the teacher demanded it.

Deciding whether or not to finish stories also differed between school and self-sponsored writing. Stories for school were finished by these able writers, because "you had to finish them." With self-sponsored writing a student might never finish a story. Even with use of the computer, it was different "for school writing, than your own writing," as explained by Geoffrey, who used the word processor for school stories because he didn't want to waste space on the disk for his own work, suggesting that his personal writing was less important.

In terms of writing choices, some students wrote stories for school but wrote poetry for their own self-sponsored writing. The following poem "Nightmare," was inspired by an experience one of the students had. Chereen did not share this poem with her classmates, because she felt it was too personal. Like several of the other students interviewed, she preferred poetry for her self-sponsored writing. "Nightmare" is included here to make the point that this piece of writing would never be shared at school, since it is seen as too personal to the writer.

Nightmare

I scream as I fall into the darkness,
but I hear nothing.
I grab for something to stop myself with,
but I find nothing.
I open my eyes to see where I am going,
but I see nothing.
I sniff that I might know where I am,
but I smell nothing.
I stay silent -- hoping to hear something,
but I hear nothing.
I somehow sense that I will feel great pain.

But I feel nothing.
Terrified,

I run.
Running anywhere,
Anywhere to get away
From this horrible
Nothing.
To get away from this land of nightmares.
Hoping,
With all my heart,
That this is not a sign of the day to come.

by Chereen

Sharing self-sponsored writing depended on how personal the piece was, and how much the writer trusted the adult, peer or sibling they considered sharing their work with. These students said that more was at stake for them if they shared self-sponsored writing because it was more representative of how they truly felt than school writing. Therefore, another difference worth noting was that most self-sponsored writing was not shared at school.

These students said that when they were not involved in selecting topics, the audience, or the purpose required for writing at school, the assignment became writing for the teacher, and not themselves. This meant that the overall attitude towards teacher-assigned writing and self-sponsored writing was significantly different. Writing for oneself was seen as enjoyable. School writing assignments were often seen as trivial, but requiring hard work. These students wanted to be given choices and be more involved in the writing situation. One student wrote in her journal, "I think the most important thing is to show students how much fun writing is, instead of discouraging them with dull, lengthy exercises" (Tania, interview two). Another student said, "Before grade eight I wasn't writing -- it was just for school, but now I'm really getting into it," (Dena, interview two), implying that her own self-sponsored writing was real and school assignments were not.

Understanding that writing at home is different than writing at school begs the question "What conditions in the classroom potentially inhibit a student's desire to write at school?" By looking at these students' writing practices, some interesting observations can be made that have implications for teaching. Although teachers have very little control over some of the conditions that make writing at school difficult, such as the disruption caused by the bell, they do have control over other conditions such as allowing students an interval of time to think about their writing before they revise it. How can teachers take the distinctions mentioned by these students, between school and self-sponsored writing into consideration, so that writing at school is seen in a more positive light?

First of all, the most significant contention made by these youngsters was that writing assignments given by the teacher were trivial. However, they found their own writing to be an enjoyable, challenging endeavour. This meant that they did not view the writing at school as meaningful. One suggestion would be to set writing topics with the students' input. Together, the class could determine topics that everyone was interested in, or topical areas that were general enough, that students could write on their own interests within the broader topic. Students need the flexibility to make teacher-assigned topics their own so that they can write from experience. Atwell (1987) and Graves (1982) suggest students choose all writing topics.

Secondly, rather than having many small writing assignments, teachers might choose to give only a few assignments that were of a more global nature. Finally, an aspect worth considering may be that students need more direction with the topic than they are sometimes given. Teachers can provide time and direction to help students find enough ideas to write knowledgeably about a topic.

Another finding from the interviews was that students engaged in different practices for school writing, such as writing outlines, than they did for self-sponsored writing. Also different was that students finished writing for school because it had to be handed in; otherwise, they didn't have the self-discipline to finish what they wrote. Therefore, a second way for teachers to make writing at school a more successful experience is to re-examine writing programs to see which expectations are worthwhile ones to continue, and which expectations need to be changed. For example, setting deadlines is a necessary requirement for students to complete their writing, but requiring that all students write outlines is not.

A final consideration was that many of these students said they preferred to write poetry and wrote it at home because they were not given the opportunity at school. Students who prefer to express their ideas and feelings in poetry deserve to be given the opportunity. Teachers can give their students choices about which kinds of writing they would like to write. These students also said they were reluctant to share their poetry with the class. Teachers can also respect the wishes of individuals making it clear that students do not have to share their writing if they don't want to share it. At the same time, if sharing writing is the teacher's expectation for the class, teachers can look at ways to make sharing less threatening, such as allowing students to exchange their work with one other classmate, or with the teacher. These are only a few of the areas that teachers can influence to make writing at school a more enjoyable, successful, and meaningful experience for everyone.

Computers, Poetry, and Journals

Composing on the computer, writing poetry and keeping journals were three areas that students expressed viewpoints on, which may have ramifications for teachers. The point can be made here that while the opinions expressed here by these students are true for this group, teachers need to talk to their own classes to find out what their opinions are on these three areas. However, for this study, computers and journals were not popular, while poetry was.

First of all, although word processors have dramatically changed writing speed, allowing writers to keep up with the rapid flow of ideas while composing, these students had not discovered the efficiency of using the word processor and preferred to write their first drafts by hand. Even though, some of these students mentioned that they felt hampered by how slow their writing hand was to respond to the speed of their ideas, most preferred to compose by hand. One student explained that for him, the word processor was used after formulating his ideas for the story, because he felt that he was more creative when he used a pen and paper. He used the computer, however, as an editing tool.

One reason why these students did not feel comfortable using computers could be that they have not had a great deal of experience using them for writing. Budget limitations and the popularity of computers in a school sometimes have an effect on whether or not language arts students have access to computers. A second reason why they may not enjoy writing on computers could be that writing on the computer in a classroom situation does not afford the writer privacy. As the writer struggles to compose, words appear on the screen for everyone to read. Some students may not be comfortable with how public their text becomes. Whatever the reason, these students preferred to compose by hand.

However, an area of writing that was popular with these students was poetry. Many of these students enjoyed experimenting with poetry, particularly free verse. Some of these writers saw poetry as a different thought process because they felt that it was more creative and inspired and short story writing was more logical and planned. Of course, this view was a distortion of the process used by many poets and short story writers. For these writers, however, poetry was a form they felt successful with, because they could complete a poem in one sitting; whereas, story writing was an ongoing process that required many attempts. Another reason these students enjoyed writing poetry was that they wanted to express their feelings. Often they used poetry as a vehicle to explore feelings about important issues. Therefore, poetry was a favourite form of expression for these young writers.

The third issue to be raised here is the use of journals in the classroom. The majority of these students did not like writing in journals. Nearly all had experiences writing in journals for school. These students cited the following reasons they didn't like writing in journals. First of all, writing on demand was a problem. Students said they didn't know what to write, and they felt that what they wrote was trivial. Secondly, students did not want to write anything too personal in their journals. Then, students said they found it hard to stay interested in the journal after the initial momentum had died. Several students compared writing in their journals to how they felt about keeping regular entries in a diary; at first they were keen to write, but then writing became a chore, especially if the journals were written on a daily basis. Finally, students volunteered that they didn't write in their journals regularly as the teacher requested, but instead often waited until the deadline and wrote the night before. These students did not see any purpose for keeping journals although, all said that published writers should keep journals so that they don't lose ideas. For all the reasons mentioned, journals were not a popular form of writing.

The information given by these students about their preferences with regard to keeping journals, writing poetry and composing on the computer may be different than with a regular mix of heterogeneous students in the classroom. However, this research is valuable because, once again, it illustrates that teachers need to plan instructional practices that take into account the varied needs of their students. Teachers may decide to give their students a simple questionnaire or writing survey to find out the preferences of their students. This information can be valuable for organizing instruction. If some students are not comfortable composing on the computer, teachers can offer them a choice of using the computer or composing by hand, or of using the computer for certain stages of the process, such as editing and not drafting. Secondly, recognizing that poetry is not as intimidating a form of writing as some other forms, teachers can encourage students to express their ideas in poetry or alternate forms. Also, knowing that students may like poetry, teachers can encourage their students' interest by presenting a variety of kinds of poetry, showing students the merits of free verse, inviting guest poets into the classroom to speak, and sharing some of their own poetry.

Finally, with regard to keeping journals, teachers need to communicate to students the purpose of a journal and model how to write in journals. One way to make journal keeping meaningful, might be to use journals to record what students are learning about writing. Practicing writing in journals in a way that is meaningful to students provides them with "an opportunity to test, to experiment and to begin to discover their own voice" (Carswell, 1988, p.112). Otherwise, teachers need to examine their classroom use of journals in terms of the overall purpose for having students write in journals.

These are some suggested ways that teachers can use information about their students' writing preferences to organize their writing programs.

"Correctness", Ideas, Self-Esteem and the Willingness to Share

One of the areas that these writers spoke strongly about was teacher response to student writing. From their comments it was clear that the reaction of a teacher to a student's writing had a direct impact on the student's self-esteem. There were many reasons why several of these students felt that although they were good writers, their ideas were not as appreciated by their teachers as their ability to write correctly. For example, in some classrooms, the process of writing was not emphasized at all, because correcting the product was more important. Everything depended on how the teacher marked a student's writing. Another reason these students felt their ideas were not valued was that often work was returned with a high percentage mark and no comments whatsoever. Yet, students were interested in improving their craft. They wanted specific feedback on their technique in terms of strengths and areas of need. Therefore, these students questioned what incentive there was for working hard on a story or poem if it was only given a mark and then forgotten.

Finally, these students expressed concern about the less able writers in their classrooms, because for students who had difficulty with mechanics, writing was a difficult subject when teachers marked primarily for correctness. The students interviewed asked that teachers consider their ideas when evaluating writing because they saw good ideas as the most important component of whether or not a piece was well written. They also felt that marking a piece for correctness without recognition of its strengths, or an explanation of how its weaknesses could be improved was ineffective. Students who hated writing were said to be students who had trouble with spelling and grammar. It was difficult for them to meet with success. In many respects, the commentary provided by some of the students in this study about how some of their teachers responded to student writing, especially with less able writers, was a sad indictment of practice in the field. If these students' experiences are true, the intent of the provincial curriculum for language arts is not being met.

Sharing writing was another important issue with this group. Several students said they did not like to hear others read their writing aloud because it was never read the way it was written. Another experience that was not popular with the majority of the students was sharing their writing with their peers on a one-to-one basis or in small groups where it was discussed or dealt with in more than a cursory way. Again the reason was that the experience had been negative. In the peer sharing situation, students said they felt their work was often received negatively without constructive criticism or praise of strong features. Yet, for students to develop a sense of audience, and benefit from the opinions of others, sharing needs to occur as does anticipation of a reader. "One important dimension of development in writing ability is the growth of sense of audience, the growth of the ability to make adjustments and choices in writing which take account of the audience for whom it is intended" (Rosen, 1973, p. 177). Dal believed that sharing her writing had helped her to grow as a writer. "I went to a writing conference and since we had to read our work to other writers, I did much better." (interview two). Several of the students said that sharing their writing was a good idea because they welcomed feedback, but they found their classroom sharing situations to be unproductive and hurtful. No student had experienced hearing a teacher's writing; however, the majority of these students welcomed the possibility.

With regard to sharing, an interesting comment was made by one of the students who said that it was easier to share her writing once she thought of herself as a writer. She explained that once she felt more self-confident about her writing ability, it was easier to share her writing. Several of these students also indicated that even the act of being interviewed and the opportunity of being able to talk with an adult about writing habits made them think differently about writing, allowing them to see themselves more as writers. The majority of these students viewed sharing their writing with someone who thought of them as a writer as a positive experience. Some of these writers were so keen to share their writing with me, because we had established a trusting relationship, that when the interview time was over, they suggested that they could stay longer and we could talk further about their writing!

One final aspect of sharing writing was publishing. These students had a sound understanding of publishing citing many ways their work had been published from school anthologies to hallway displays. Nearly all the students had work published in some form. They showed pride in this and saw it as something to continue to strive towards. However, the students raised one note of caution with teachers publishing student writing. They said that before a student's writing was published, the teacher needed to receive the student's permission. When Darusha saw one of her stories displayed in a mall, she was pleased to see her writing on display, but frustrated that her teacher had not asked her permission. She would have chosen a different piece to represent her writing. Publishing was an opportunity to promote student writers, but teachers had to ask the writer's permission first.

What suggestions can be given for teachers with regard to correctness, self-esteem and students' willingness to share their writing? First of all, recognizing that conditions exist and attitudes prevail that can make writing at school a frustrating activity for students, teachers can make the classroom a positive place for children to write. The following paragraphs summarize the comments students made about how teachers evaluate or receive their writing, and the close connection between sharing writing and self-esteem. Ways that teachers can make the classroom climate positive are included in each section.

First of all, evaluation of writing was seen as a major problem when teachers were only concerned with correctness. The writers in this study said that teachers could be really helpful during the writing process if they read students' work, made useful suggestions, and returned writing to the students early in the writing process. They stressed that when teachers handed back work covered with suggestions at the end of the process, it was disheartening after so much time and energy had gone into the piece. They also suggested that teachers should feel free to offer advice on mechanics, but that making suggestions about how to change or improve ideas was trespassing, because ideas were the property of the writer. Furthermore, they suggested that teachers use a balanced approach to marking their writing, marking for strengths as well as weaknesses. Susan, a student who had been labelled a poor writer because of her spelling, believed that she wasn't smart enough to write, until a teacher saw value in her work and encouraged her to feel successful once again. "We know that extensive marking of what is wrong is ineffective," says Christine Mowat (1988, p.306).

Furthermore, since the students in this study judged writing in terms of the originality and development of ideas, they felt that teachers should reward good ideas and give student writers credit for creativity, as well as marking for correctness. Marks were seen as meaningless if students were not told specifically what needed work, and what qualities in the writing were effective. Recognizing the importance of ideas to writers, teachers can discuss with students how to get, keep and find new ideas. The ownership of ideas becomes an issue when students don't know sources for ideas, and are afraid that they won't be able to come up with something that is original. Also, teachers need to be aware that some students do not want to share their writing in the early stages, because their ideas are still being developed. Students need to be able to have this freedom in order to be creative. Finally, these students ask teachers to give them recognition for the development and originality of their ideas.

The majority of opinion was that it would be a strong learning experience if teachers shared their writing. From a pedagogical point of view sharing writing with one's students allows one to remember what it is to write again, and become empathetic to writing from the point of view of a learner. It also establishes a feeling of cooperation in the class between the teacher and students.

The students in this study wanted to share their writing with a receptive audience because they felt feedback was important. John Young talked about this need to share, explaining that "creative products fulfil the creator in sharing with others" (1985, p.87). However, because sharing writing places the student at risk, and because they had experienced negative, hurtful responses to their writing, these students were reluctant to share their writing unless they knew how well it would be received. In general, being aware that the act of sharing a piece of writing involves respect and trust, teachers can model appropriate behavior for their students. Teachers also need to make it clear that sharing writing makes the writer feel vulnerable, and that disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated. Also, in order for students to understand how to respond to each other's writing, teachers need to demonstrate appropriate way to receive writing, emphasizing positive constructive criticism and specific praise of what works, over negative comments and a desire to find only what is wrong. These are all conditions that the teacher can work to control.

Teachers also need to be cognizant of the individual sharing needs of their students at different stages of writing. The teacher may use different kinds of groupings for students to share writing depending on what stage students are and how comfortable they are with sharing. Some students may prefer to read their writing aloud to a partner; whereas other students may feel quite comfortable getting the reaction of the whole class. One way for a fellow student to read his partner's writing when the writer requests that someone else read it, is for the teacher to provide this student with practice time instead of thrusting the piece on the willing volunteer, who will make some mistakes no matter how good a reader he is simply because he hasn't had time to practice. Otherwise, students should read their own writing aloud, unless they are reluctant to share in this way. These are a few suggestions for sharing that take into account individual needs.

In summary, how we receive students' writing affects their willingness to share. If students feel the sharing atmosphere is full of trust and respect, and if they are comfortable with their own writing development, students look forward to sharing because they want to receive feedback. An important aspect of evaluating a student's work is recognition for ideas. Finally, teachers need to bring a balanced approach to marking looking for the positive first and then areas of need. If teachers are willing to share their writing, everyone benefits.

A Conclusion to the Chapter

Why listen to these writers? The most compelling reason for listening to the students in this study is that they know so much about how to write. For example, these writers intuitively know if something is well written because they can tell if it "sounds right". They also tacitly understand the concept of "voice" and can tell you whether or not what they write has a voice. When pressed to specifically analyze a piece of their writing to tell me what qualities make their writing unique, these students came up with an extensive list of attributes that would make any writing teacher proud. Among our best writers, these students revealed limited views of writing, such as ideas and inspiration made writing work rather than craft. They still are confused about the relationship between ideas and correctness.

Secondly, just like the students in this study could tell me how to work with them individually to enable them to become stronger writers, students in our classes can tell us how to work best with them. This study shows how able student writers knew what they needed to work on to become better writers. One of our roles as teachers is to help all of our students improve their writing techniques. When I asked them to tell me their writing strengths from memory, these writers described in detail how they had improved as writers from the previous year. How fascinating it was to talk with these students about how they saw writing growth! These students also knew that writing took time, effort and self discipline. Furthermore, the majority volunteered that constructive criticism was necessary to help them improve. Through discussions like these with all students, teachers can turn specific responsibility for goal setting and learning about how to grow in writing over to students, where it belongs.

Another reason we should listen to these writers is to check our perception of the depth of their understanding. These students had limited experiences talking to teachers as fellow writers about their craft. They also had minimal opportunities to talk together as a community of writers about writing. It was clear from the information in this study that while these writers knew so much about their individual writing styles and preferences, they could learn considerably more about the process of writing in certain basic areas, like revision. Talking openly to students about their writing processes can help teachers decide where to begin with writing instruction.

Another reason why it is critical to listen to student writers is that students need to feel that teachers value their opinions. This validation is important in order that students develop as effective communicators. Language arts instruction offers wonderful avenues for promoting in students an appreciation of lifelong learning. The students in this study had strong literacy backgrounds. In this, they had an advantage over many of the students in our classrooms. It is difficult for teachers and good writers to understand some students. "The hardest thing for any language user to appreciate who has had more opportunities to be present in a literary event than someone less fortunate is the other's literary achievements" (Harste, Woodward, and Burke, 1984, p.138). Through discussion students can learn teachers care about them and their writing.

During the interviews I learned that the opportunity for students to talk about writing had valuable spin-offs for them also. In many cases I had to limit the second interviews when I felt that the student and myself were becoming exhausted and non-productive. Otherwise, these interviews would have lasted many hours instead of two or more. This is because once the students started talking, they wanted to continue talking. Many volunteered that this was their first opportunity to talk with an adult writer about their writing. It was interesting to watch their confidence grow from the first to the second interview because initially these writers had to struggle to find words to express their ideas. Since they had little experience talking about writing as writers, they did not have a language to use. These writers had to learn to articulate what they knew intuitively. Students in our classrooms have difficulty articulating what they also know about writing and reading. Talking with students at the most basic level, the level of their experience allows language to develop and students' knowledge to be confirmed. Equally important, students begin to learn that writing and reading are interrelated; something English teachers often take for granted that students know, and therefore fail to teach.

Finally, these students have suggestions for teachers about the writing classroom as an easier, more effective place to write and the teacher's overall role in the process. Suggestions on helping students develop meaningful writing topics, making teacher expectations clear to students, individualizing instruction, using time appropriately, guiding students step-by-step through revision, marking student writing fairly, establishing a trusting atmosphere that promotes respectful sharing, balancing the teaching of grammar with encouraging creativity, planning instruction cooperatively with students, and treating strong writers and developing writers differently in terms of specific instruction are all areas where teachers can benefit from listening to their students. Finally, our students have so much to share about the practice of writing if we will only listen.

Chapter Eight

Thesis Conclusion: The Story Continues

During the course of writing this thesis three significant events occurred which influenced my thoughts about writing. The first was that I became a mother and had the opportunity to look at learning in a very different way through the daily developments of a newborn. Secondly, I returned to teaching after a two year absence at university and became immersed in the Nancie Atwell method of teaching reading and writing using a workshop approach. The third event was that following my year of teaching, I became a language arts consultant and once again found myself in the position of a learner.

As a parent I watched language develop as my new daughter learned first to make sounds that represented objects, constantly experimenting with language to make meaning of her world. It was fascinating to see the baby's rehearsal with sounds. Much of the time her non-verbal behavior communicated to us that she had learned a new word. As our daughter's awareness of words grew, so did her interest in our use of language. She developed a fascination with books and pictures choosing to take her books and her boots with her to bed for comfort when she needed it. As the months progressed, Janine's understanding of what a book was also changed; she learned to behave as a reader, turning the pages of her books, and imitating our reading behavior when we read to her. It didn't matter to us that the books were often upside down. Soon she came to actually look at pictures on the pages and name them.

Once Janine learned to say a few words, other words came quickly. In no time at all, she had begun to talk in sentences. As I write this, Janine is experimenting with the letters of the alphabet. She knows for example, that the letters "panda" on her clothing are "ABC's". She has learned that letters represent words and ideas; mimicking our behavior she will spell out a litany of unrelated letters, and then whisper proudly that it is too early to go to bed, or some other three-year-old's concept of importance. Today, Janine walked proudly into her daycare, her little arms full of books, eager to share her love of reading with her peers. Although she can not make sense of printed words yet, I know that reading will come soon because already she tells us to listen as she sits down with one of her books and recites it from memory saying first, "Let me read it!"

As I watch the acquisition of language at home, I am struck by the parallel development I observe in students as they develop their writing ability in school. First of all, both are beginning to find the right words to express their thoughts. Although adolescents know how to read and write, I learned through teaching writer's workshop that they did not possess a language to talk about writing, yet. This was due to a variety of reasons but it was primarily because they had not experienced decision making on any level when it came to making choices and taking responsibility for their writing.

While Janine needed encouragement from the adults in her life as she learned to develop and experiment with language, so did my students. They needed an atmosphere free of criticism and open to risk taking in order to feel confident enough to experiment with writing. Since I wrote along with my students and shared my own writing, I learned more than ever before that the connection between writing and self-esteem is fragile. As a teacher, my role became one of affirming good choices, acknowledging well written pieces, empathizing when hard work had not paid off and writing was abandoned, and overall, encouraging risk taking. Once I let go and really allowed my students to learn, I found that my teaching stance become more the coaching, parenting role I had taken with Janine as she learned to talk and develop language at home. I also saw that in many ways my students were as dependent on my encouragement and support as my growing child.

As an observor of how my students were learning, I soon realized that their process of learning to write could not be graphed as a line steadily moving upward in a diagonal path. Instead, like I had witnessed with Janine who seemed to reach plateaus where no new words were learned, my students' progress also levelled off at certain times. As they became more proficient at expressing themselves, they seemed to move forward, appear static, maybe even slide backward slightly, and then move forward again. There were spurts followed by lulls where nothing seemed to be happening in terms of learning. For example, one student spent an inordinate amount of time on a poem and was reluctant to discard it. Frustrated, he saw some spark in the writing that still attracted his interest, although to others the poem appeared meaningless. However, he persevered refusing to give up and continued to work with the piece. Finally, still having difficulty, he gave up on the piece, went home that night and wrote something altogether different, but brilliant! With both Janine and my students, learning was unpredictable. My expectations of the quality of writing that students were capable of achieving constantly changed, as they surprised me with some new step forward.

The hardest part of teaching within this new organizational structure was relinquishing control. Time and time again, I had to remind myself to set timelines, establish consistent rules of behaviour, and then let go so that my students could write and learn. Sometimes teaching pressures closed in, such as report card deadlines or negative comments from colleagues who were used to teaching in a more traditionally accepted way. On these occasions it was easy to be consumed with self-doubt and consider returning to the way I had always taught. However, it was at these moments when I most questioned my new practice, that a student who had always had trouble with language arts would show me her latest poem full of teenage passion about adult issues, and I would be reminded of how many successes she had already met with, so far that year because of this approach.

Books became important to Janine because we made them important; the same thing happened with writing and my students. For example, when I talked writer's workshop and told students of the importance of sharing writing, they politely listened and wrote as they had always written for teachers. But, when I started having writers visit my classes, found the courage to share my own writing, and showed students in other ways by my actions that writing was important, they began to take it seriously and write for themselves.

Although I had read Atwell and believed in the value of sharing my writing with students, I needed an extra push before I felt comfortable doing it. I mention this here, because I have learned that other teachers have the same hesitation to share their writing with students, and yet if there was one single teaching suggestion that made a difference in my situation, it was sharing my writing. The push came from my advisor who visited one of my grade nine classes, shared a piece of her writing with them, and modelled how to receive writing for my students and the other language arts teachers in the school. Watching her demonstration lesson was a turning point for me, and I shared my writing from that day on with my classes.

Coming from the university back to teaching after an absence of two years and implementing a new teaching style was a challenge. Although I had read Atwell's book twice previously, it was difficult to put her theory and practice into my classroom. The first obstacle I faced was my students' questions about our program. Because they were not used to having so much responsibility and freedom, they had doubts initially about this method of instruction. I was also a new teacher to the school so I did not have an established reputation with the students. However, from the first day I talked to them as if we were a community of writers. I explained that we would be learning together. They could write about their own topics, they could choose their own books to read, and most importantly, they would be given the majority of their language arts periods to read and write. Setting the tone for our classroom helped allay some of their fears.

Their first language arts assignment was to respond to a letter that I had written to them explaining the program, my expectations for their learning, and a few personal things about me. This method, suggested by Atwell, was easily revised to include asking students to set reading and writing goals, as well. The letters they wrote back were wonderful, full of their personalities, interests and hobbies. When it came to setting their own reading and writing goals, however, most of the students had no idea what to suggest.

I should have picked up on this clue and realized how inexperienced my students were at setting their own goals for growth in language arts. Instead, over the course of the next two months, I struggled to teach my students the classroom routines of Nancie Atwell's approach to workshop. Some of these struggles were bringing their reading response journals to reading class and responding regularly in their journals to the novels they were reading, remembering whether or not a class period was reading or writing, finding something to write about, remembering to keep all drafts of their writing, teaching them how to revise their writing, learning when and how to hand in their writing and reading journals, coming to class prepared to work, and learning how to work with other students. There were many routines to learn and we struggled together to establish the classroom organization so that everything ran smoothly.

One of the most difficult aspects of working with a new program was that although Atwell provides the teacher with many suggestions for daily mini-lessons, I still had to create my own curriculum as I learned to implement hers. I tried to implement her practice as she explained it in the book In the Middle. Writing, Reading and Learning With Adolescents (1987) and this was very difficult. First of all, Atwell had double the language arts time for working with her students. Secondly, her class periods were structured into longer blocks. And then of course, I was not Nancie Atwell, so I had to learn to do things my way. These things I was only barely aware of at the time. Most of my year was spent experimenting by taking her program and attempting to make it mine. Since dividing my whole program into the two halves of reading and writing was a new structure for me, I was afraid to deviate too much from the text, which became my Bible, in case I might fail. I was lucky to have the support of my administrator, and my recent research and instruction from university helped also, since I knew that the Atwell approach was respected.

I had also chosen to work half time, so I had the other half of my day to reflect on my teaching practice and plan the next day. Working half time was probably what allowed me to stick with the program. Several times throughout the year I was tempted to throw out this new approach. It was simply too hard. I found that even though I only had three grade nine classes, I was exhausted most of the time. One of the most tiring components of the program was the time and energy I put into talking individually with students about their writing. Although there was less writing to mark in terms of whole class sets of assignments being handed in on a particular date, there was always writing trickling in from my three classes to be read and discussed on the next day with the students. I discovered that working my way around the classroom to make sure that everyone was on task, and to discuss writing with students who were ready and needed to decide where to go next with their work was like having a whole day of intense parent teacher interviews.

On one occasion, shortly after the Christmas break, I decided to ask the students to evaluate the program first, before I quit using it and went back to my old style of teaching. I asked them to be honest. The responses from all the students were positive! They had excellent suggestions. No one wanted to quit reading and writing workshop. Some students indicated that they were reading for the first time in their lives. I continued to persevere.

The second time I actually quit teaching workshop for a month. This was in April. I was concerned about whether or not my students were having enough group time together. This is one of the weaker components of the program as explained by Nancie Atwell because although there is plenty of student-to-student sharing and whole class sharing of writing, the teacher has to find opportunities to include small group work. I was particularly concerned that students were not learning any of the cooperative learning skills that were the rage that year. For a month my students studied poetry using different cooperative learning exercises where I varied the size and combinations of the groups. With one of my classes I introduced a group novel project using novels from the junior high recommended novels list. During this time I assigned a couple of writing assignments that I wanted my students to write.

After a week of returning to a more traditional approach, my students asked me when they could read and write again. "But we are reading," I explained. "You're reading poetry and we're trying some of the new recommended novels."

"It's not the same," they said.

I wasn't sure what my students meant until I asked them to write about Alfred Hitchcock's movie "The Birds", using a R.A.F.T.S. (role, audience, format, verb tense, subject) approach. When the assignments were done, the students read their various pieces aloud and we commented together on each one, whether poem, story, interview, or other form. Somehow, although each story was a different point of view and a different format, they all sounded the same! I was reminded of my research. I remembered interviewing Tania. She had commented that when her teacher specified what to write, their writing all sounded the same. Tania had used the example of a teacher assigning a certain number of particular figures of speech. Although I had given what I thought was an open-ended writing assignment, my teacher-imposed criteria had in fact, limited their writing. Christie (1983) explained this well:

> It is the development of the individual learning to express personal points of view which is perceived to be important, and there is an associated reluctance to offer too much direction to students in their writing, on the grounds that that choice in writing, and capacity for individual self expression, may actually be inhibited or denied. (Christie, 1983, p. 5)

I had set the direction for this writing assigment and their writing sounded lack lustre compared to what they had written during the workshop classes.

"When do we get to do some 'real' writing?" asked Landon.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"This is teacher writing," he said. "It's not real!"

Landon's comments hit home. I wrapped up the different projects including my poetry unit and we got back to workshop. It was not all smooth sailing however. A month's lapse meant that I had to spend time re-teaching the routine and re-establishing that my students were responsible for their own reading and writing.

Now that I have had some reflection time to think about how different this approach was to my former teaching style, I doubt if I can ever go back to the way I used to teach. Many of the things I learned from teaching workshop to adolescents are things that the students in this study had already told me. For example, students in my study had told me to be flexible when it came to setting writing deadlines; the students in my classes said flexibility was critical in order to be creative. Yet, both groups also acknowledged that deadlines were necessary in order to finish pieces. Other similarities in students' comments between the interviews and workshop were also evident.

First of all, I learned that my students could talk about writing and wanted to share what they knew about their own writing styles. This was difficult for them to verbalize beyond a basic explanation of the method each used to write a story and their difficulties writing, because my students were not used to talking about writing. We needed to develop a common language. Part of the problem was that both my students and I were not used to talking to each other as fellow learners. It was hard for me to give up my role as teacher-expert for teacher-learner, and it was difficult for them to trust me enough to honestly dialogue about writing. We had trouble talking about what good writing was because we needed to find words to express our opinions about good writing. Although I had taught language arts for many years, I had never taken the time to address the issue of "What is good writing?" in so direct a way. In order to work at improving our writing, and because we were becoming critical readers, we had to spend time working on this goal.

Because I shared my own writing, I learned what it felt like to be vulnerable. Students saw by my actions that I was indeed a learner. Using the method of (a) reacting positively, (b) asking a question, and (c) making a suggestion -- if the author wanted one -- some of my students volunteered to share their own writing with the whole class. I had worked hard to establish trust, but it wasn't until I trusted my students with my writing that they in turn really came to trust me with theirs.

One of the things I learned about using this method of responding to a piece of writing was that my students had trouble saying something positive. In all their years of analyzing the short story and looking at structure, they had not learned to look at a piece of writing and ask, "What makes this writing good?" Together we brainstormed what qualities we felt were present in good writing. I asked them to think about the qualities that immediately attracted them to a book.

This is when we really started to talk about what quality writing is and how we know if something we have read is well written. Before students were comfortable responding to each other's writing and my writing, I spent many lessons discussing this question with them. Trying to find our own ideas of what made writing "good" was something that we grappled with all year. If I had taught the same group a second year, it would have been wonderful to extend this area of learning. For example, I believe that learning would really have occurred when we discussed Earle Birney's poem "David", because we had already come so far together as a community of learners.

As I mentioned in my introduction, the third event that occurred was becoming a language arts consultant with my school board. Once again, I found myself in the role of a learner, only this time I had to learn how to work with my colleagues. The most exciting development for me, to date, has been the interest generated from junior high teachers in our District towards reading and writing workshops. For three years consecutively three other presenters and I have given a four part workshop on the Nancie Atwell approach to teaching workshop. As well, the interest generated from this series has resulted in an evening teacher-as-writer group. We spend some time writing, and some time sharing our writing, but often stories of teaching occupy most of our time together. Our evening group has survived because junior high teachers using the workshop approach need to have the opportunity to write, and the support of a network of colleagues who understand.

One thing I hear often from teachers beginning writer's workshop is that, once the initial bloom is off the rose, it is hard for students to continue to feel motivated to write. I think back on my own difficult year teaching workshop and the conversations I have had with students in this study; what students remember are the written pieces that had a purpose and a specified audience. It is important to find writing opportunities that are meaningful to students.

In particular, I remember one student called Karen, a bright honours student who was used to getting high marks without much effort. The system I used to evaluate writing in workshop rewarded students who were willing to set goals and work hard to earn them. Karen was amazed that her first term mark was not in the honours range, and yet, she had done very little writing. Her parents were the only parents who questioned me about my program. Both teachers, they had concerns because Karen had always done so well in language arts. I explained the program and answered a long letter Karen had written to me in her writing journal concerning her grade. Although she wasn't happy with her mark, it stayed the same. I would like to say that Karen went on to make considerable improvements that year. However, she didn't. Although her mark did improve the next term, I never felt that she gave the program her best. However, Karen was one of the students who made the time at the end of the year to come and thank me for learning so much about writing. For this, I was very thankful.

Recently, one of the teachers who is using workshop shared one of the writing activities that his students had found meaningful. During the Persian Gulf Crisis his students wanted to write about their feelings, and he had encouraged them. This resulted in many excellent pieces of student work. A reporter for the university paper The Gateway, who was taking his curriculum course in the school at the time, wrote an article where he featured the students' writing and talk about war. Thus, the students' writing reached a wider audience than had been originally anticipated. This was exactly the kind of spontaneous writing situation that students in my program had found meaningful.

Thinking back to my teaching experiences with workshop, I remembered a student of mine staying late at his father's office to use the lazer printer so he could complete a poem. We planned to use his poem as part of a writing display posted in two shopping malls and our school board office building. Neil brought me the piece. I will never forget the strong images he had collected or the passion of his message. I knew that Neil's poem had to be shared with his peers. When I asked him if he would consider reading it, and if we could make a copy for everyone to see, on the overhead he agreed.

The day came for Neil to share his poem which he insisted on reading aloud to the class. When it came time to share, Neil asked if he could have a few minutes alone first.

He went into the hallway and we watched him pacing up and down practicing reading the poem until he was ready. The class just waited. When Neil came back in and read the piece, my heart went out to him. The poem meant so much to Neil. My fears of whether his classmates would respect his vulnerability or not were relieved when I saw them react to the piece. They displayed empathy, curiosity and respect. For both Neil and me, it was a moving experience, the kind of experience that is truly a teaching moment.

Not long afterwards we had a parent's night as part of Education Week. I asked students if they would be interested in sharing their writing in front of an audience of parents at the Open House. We fixed up the drama room so that stools and benches were at different heights, dimmed the lights and waited for our audience to arrive. I was as nervous as the ten students who had volunteered, because I had also volunteered to read a couple of my own poems aloud. I don't know what the parents who came thought. They seemed to enjoy the readings. Many of the poems read were full of raw emotion; others were less provocative. For those of us who read our work to this audience, it was a rewarding experience.

Important questions from teachers such as how to continue to motivate students to write throughout the year; how to assist students to discover purposeful, meaningful writing assignments; and how to broaden the writing experience for students so that writing is shared with a wider community are questions that teachers struggling to change their language arts program face daily. Teachers continuously reflecting on their writing programs have the desire to make significant changes in the kind and nature of their instruction. They need a strong support system from those in the field who are struggling with similar issues. These teachers are looking for different kinds of professional support than the traditional lecture style presentation delivered by an "expert".

Our series of inservices on readers' and writers' workshops was successful because with the exception of myself, the other presenters were teachers currently in the classroom. In my job as consultant I am fortunate to visit classrooms. When I talk to a teacher about presenting an inservice, or when I listen to our teacher writer group, I am struck by the fact that teaching has its own daily reality that is constantly changing. The dynamics of the classroom with so many variables constantly introduced from within as well as outside, means that the teaching situation is always in a state of flux. Although I am learning about writing by working at the consultant level this year, and by the reflection that comes from writing this thesis, my fellow writing teachers are constantly developing their own ways of knowing about writing instruction from working daily with students. I have come to realize that to be a better consultant I need to remember that workshop was successful with my students because the responsibility for learning was left to them. The same is true of our profession.

Alternative methods of providing professional development for teachers must capitalize on this learning that occurs daily. Our teacher writer group is an example because we meet to share teachers' stories about life in the classroom. Another important opportunity occurs when teachers visit other teacher's classrooms to observe teaching taking place. For example, a teacher interested in watching workshop in action arranged to have her language arts staff visit another teacher's classroom. The visitors joined small groups of students and helped them brainstorm ideas about what to write. Because the teacher had modelled the activity first, it worked with the small groups. The best part of the afternoon was that afterwards we de-briefed informally in the staff room, and the talk about writing instruction was exceptionally stimulating. The teachers from the visiting school all came with different ideas about writing. They were all at different levels of teacher readiness and knowledge about how children write. The discussion was rich, getting at the very heart of what constitutes writing and its teaching.

Another example where professional development occurs when teachers work cooperatively is the group marking sessions that some schools participate in. Working as a team to grade each other's papers, with teachers from special programs like English as a Second Language or across subject areas, allows a group to learn the range of writing that students demonstrate in every classroom and provides an opportunity to discuss standards for evaluation. Perhaps the main benefit from this kind of inservice is that, through the exercise, teachers learn how their beliefs about writing are consistent with their colleagues' beliefs. This common enterprise becomes an affirmation of practice, something much needed by language arts teachers who often feel isolated and unsure of how to evaluate because they feel that they are being too subjective. The talk about writing that is a by-product of team marking is a wonderful opportunity for staff professional development.

My experience away from the classroom at university, having a baby, writing this thesis, returning to teaching, and finally, as a consultant, has made me a different person. Also, during the course of writing this thesis, my husband and I have been fortunate to adopt two teenagers, which means that along with our infant daughter Janine, we now have Janis, and Ian to teach us about the world of adolescents. Our lives have never been more fulfilled than they are with our new family.

Because of the teacher writing group I have started writing again. This is important to me. I feel that the more I write, the better I become at writing. I know I will continue to learn if I continue to be involved with the real world of the classroom and if I continue to write and listen to writers. My hope is that through reading my story, others may reflect on their own teaching stories, and in turn, remember that a valuable source of teaching information exists in the presence of their students who like the students in this study, have so much to offer about the teaching of writing. As teachers we will continue to learn if, as Delvina said, we remember to continue to "create curious".

> *I couldn't figure out a way to start, and then I remembered a teacher saying, to create curious and just start from there. (interview two)*

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APPENDIX 1

EXAMPLE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

Typical Questions Asked During the First Interview

1. Why were you chosen to attend the 3-2-1 Write Conference?
2. Did you enjoy the conference? Explain.

3. Tell me about your writing. Do you enjoy writing? Explain.

4. What kind of writing do you do?
5. Do you write stories? . . . poetry?

6. What is your favourite piece of writing? Tell me about it.

7. Can you remember stories you wrote? Describe them.

8. Where do you get your ideas for writing?

9. Where do you write the most comfortably? . . . school? . . . home? Explain.
10. What do you like to do when you write? For example, do you write to music? . . . Quiet? Explain.
11. Do you prefer to write with pencils? . . . pens?
12. What kind of paper do you like to use?

13. Do you write your ideas down first?
14. Do you plan as you write?

15. Do you revise as you write?
16. Do you revise afterwards?

17. How many drafts do you write?

18. Have you ever entered a story you wrote in a contest?
19. Did you win? How did it feel?

20. Do you enjoy writing with a partner? Why or why not?

21. What things make it difficult to write?
22. How does your teacher assist you to write successfully?
23. Does your teacher do anything that makes it difficult to write?

24. Do you like writing at school? Why or why not?
25. Do you enjoy writing at home? Why or why not?
26. Could you suggest changes to your school writing situation that would make it perfect?

27. Do you read?
28. What kind of books do you read?
29. Have you always read? What kind of books?
30. Did your parents read to you when you were little?
31. Do your parents enjoy reading?

32. Do you watch television?
33. Where do you get your ideas for writing?

34. When you write outside school, do you:
    (a) show your writing to others?
    (b) revise writing you have done previously?

35. Could you describe your writing process from start to finish?

36. Do you have any questions?
37. What questions should I ask you that I missed?

38. At our next meeting I would like you to bring a piece of writing that I can take away with me. Did you bring anything to give me today?

39. I would like to give you a journal. Following this interview, I would like you to please write down any ideas or questions you have about anything to do with writing. You could also choose to write down story ideas. Bring the journal with you next time.

Typical Questions Asked During the Second Interviews

1. What kind of writing have you done since the beginning of the year in school?
2. What creative writing have you done since I last talked with you?

3. Do you think you have grown as a writer since grade eight? Explain.

4. What problems do you have writing?

5. Did you feel like writing after I interviewed you?
6. Did you write in the journal over the summer? . . . just before this interview?

7. How do you feel about keeping a journal?
8. ..Do you think published authors keep journals? Why or why not?
9. Did you show your journal to anyone?

10. Can you remember when you first started to write?
11. Did you write as well, or better, than other kids in your class?

12. Have you had a friend, parent or teacher who has influenced you as a writer? Explain.
13. What about your family? Has anyone in your family influenced you to write? Does anyone write?

14. Does your family have favourite stories they like to tell?
15. Were you told stories as a child?

16. How do you use your free time? . . . lessons? . . . responsibilities? . . . homework? . . .sports?
17. Do you feel you have as much free time as you want?
18. How do you fit reading and writing into your free time?
19. How much television do you watch in a week?

20. What could you do to become a better writer?

21. Do you know what the word voice means? If yes, explain voice in your own words.
22. (If the student does not understand, explain voice using the example of an author they are familiar with, like Stephen King.) Do you think your writing has a strong voice? (If yes): Tell me what makes your writing sound like you. How is your writing different than your friends?

23. Do you think of yourself as a writer? Why or why not?
24. How do you think of yourself?

25. Would you like to have a group of writers your own age to share your writing with?
26. Are you interested in reading the work of other students your age?

Please choose a piece of your writing to read to me.
27. Why did you choose this piece?
28. How do you feel about it? Explain.
29. Pick one part of your writing that you like and read it to me. Why do you like this part?
30. What is good about this part? Explain.
31. Is there anything you would change? Why or why not?
32. Who else has seen this piece?
33. How did you feel when I asked you to bring something to share?

Let us look at your journal.
34. What do you want to tell me about your journal?

My writing.
35. Would you like to see something I've written?
36. What would you like to ask me about this story?
37. Please read the first two pages and comment.

Final question.
38. What advice can you give me about teaching writing?